

BOB SPENCER

THE LIFE SAVER



UNCLE
SAM'S
SERVICE
SERIES

CAPTAIN TAYLOR ARMITAGE





BOB SPENCER
THE LIFE SAVER

BOOKS BY
CAPTAIN TAYLOR ARMITAGE

UNCLE SAM'S SERVICE SERIES

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Price per volume,
\$1.00 net

BOB SPENCER THE LIFE SAVER,
Or, Guarding the Coast for Uncle Sam
DAVE SPENCER ON SECRET SERVICE
Or, Uncle Sam's Search for Counterfeiters

(Other volumes in preparation)

NEW YORK

SULLY AND KLEINTEICH





The task of receiving the woman, perhaps the Captain's wife, had been accomplished safely. [See p. 162]

BOB SPENCER
THE
LIFE SAVER
OR
*GUARDING THE COAST FOR
UNCLE SAM*

BY
CAPTAIN TAYLOR ARMITAGE

ILLUSTRATED



NEW YORK
SULLY AND KLEINTEICH

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MAR 26 1914

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PREFACE

DEAR BOYS:—

IN this new series of books which I expect to place before you, I shall aim not only to afford a fair amount of interesting adventure reading, such as every healthy lad loves; but at the same time to give absolutely reliable descriptions in connection with considerable of the business conducted in Uncle Sam's great workshops.

I trust that every one of my young friends will enjoy reading about the remarkable events that came to pass in the lives of these five sturdy and ambitious sons of Colonel Frederic Spencer,—Frank, Fred, Bob, Sam and Dave, after they in turn found themselves in the employ of the Government. And you can rest assured that whatever I have written concerning the working of the Life-saving Service, the Army, the Navy, the Revenue Department as connected with the Secret Service—and last but not least, the conservation of the mines, forests and other resources that are the natural heritage of the Nation, has all a firm foundation in fact, as recorded in the yearly reports, which are

issued for distribution by the great Government Printing Office in Washington.

Nor can the gallant Spencer family really be looked on as a myth. All over this glorious land of ours may be found many families where the seed has been sown in good ground; so that in due season other members, urged on by similar aspirations, will seek eagerly to enter the various branches of Uncle Sam's service.

It is the hope of the Nation, this desire on the part of our boys to serve their country under the Stars and Stripes, no matter in what capacity, or in what field. And we would do well to encourage such a laudable ambition by every honorable means in our power.

Sincerely yours,

CAPTAIN TAYLOR ARMITAGE.

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Bob managed to get the sailor off the track and over to the other rails, just as the ponderous locomotive, with its rumbling cars, swept past. 100 ✓

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BOB SPENCER THE LIFE SAVER

CHAPTER I

ALONG THE JUNIPER

“COME on, I’ll race both of you!”

“Is that a challenge, Bob?”

“I meant it for one, Fred; that is, if both you and Frank feel like taking a swim with me.”

“Well, it’s surely a warm afternoon, even for July; and I reckon the cool water of the good old Juniper would feel pretty fine. I’ve got half a notion to take you up on that dare, Bob; though it’s a small chance any of us ever have against a regular water-rat like you.”

“How about you, Frank?”

“Oh! if the rest mean to jump in, I’m not the fellow to sit moping on the bank, and miss all the fun.”

“That sounds good to me. Now, let’s see who’ll be the first to dive off this high bank here. Get busy, boys!”

While the three boys are tossing off their garments, in anticipation of enjoying their favorite sport, let us take advantage of the opportunity to make their acquaintance, and learn just what relationship Bob, Fred and Frank bear to one another.

Colonel Frederic Spencer had served his country during the Spanish war with distinction, and left one of his arms on the battlefield near Santiago. He came of a long line of patriotic Americans, stretching away back to the days of the early pioneers; so that it was not strange that every one of his sons should be imbued with a healthy and determined desire to enter the service of Uncle Sam, when the eagerly-awaited chance arrived.

There were just six children living, and five of them boys, sturdy fellows every one; with two pair of twins in the lot. Janice, the only girl, happened to round up the half dozen; and it can be readily understood that she was the idol of her five brothers—a little queen, whose every wish they loved to gratify.

First came Dave and Frank, as the older twins were named; and Frank somehow always allowed Dave to assume the airs of an elder brother, since it was said that he had seen the light of day first.

Then there were Fred and Sam, the second pair, with the former such a sober fellow that every one looked upon him as much older than his mate.

Energetic Bob was the last of the boys, though no one would suspect it because of his size and muscular development, which made him the peer of even Frank, several years older.

Bob was the wild horse of the lot, and, though good-hearted and impulsive, caused his father many a heart-ache because of his mischievous ways. He was above playing mean pranks; but seemed to be possessed of a spirit of rollicking fun, and throughout the entire community around the town of Clayton, if any trick chanced to be turned that was plainly the work of boys, Bob was immediately saddled with the blame, though doubtless in many instances he had nothing to do with the matter. It was a case of giving a dog a bad name over again.

When it came to water sports Bob had no equal among his fellows; and perhaps it was partly this that, next to Sam, had always made him a favorite with his grandfather; who had once commanded a gunboat on the Mississippi during the Civil war, and whose love for the navy seemed to have come down to some of the boys of the third generation.

Fred Spencer, on the other hand, did not seem to be an adventurous boy, like his brothers. He was something of a book-worm, and would rather be left alone in his "den," to pore over the Government reports on conservation, and such topics,

than be out playing baseball, or even fishing in the clear waters of the Juniper.

But Fred had such a gentle disposition that all of his brothers felt toward him very much as though they must act as his protectors. He did not seem quite so rugged as the others, though this may have come from his staying indoors so much, when he should have been exercising his muscles.

It was Sam who never lost an opportunity to coax Grandfather Spencer into a cozy corner, and get him to tell of his thrilling experiences during those dark days in the far past, when this beloved country of ours was divided into hostile camps.

The old man was as patriotic as any one could wish; but there were times when Sam would discover him sitting under the apple tree in the shady side yard, tenderly stroking a tiny silken Confederate flag, which he must have carried near his heart all these long years, while a sad smile would wreath his wrinkled face.

Ah! the dear hands that had made that little token for him long ago he could never again feel pressing his. Possibly it was of *her* the old man was thinking, as well as of the stormy scenes that fell to his portion during those war times.

Then there was Dave, "long-headed Dave" they often called him, because he dearly loved to solve riddles that every one else seemed ready to give up; and was deeply interested in the workings of Uncle

Sam's Secret Service people. Perhaps the uncle after whom Dave was named, and who sometimes dropped in on them for a short stay, was in some measure responsible for the bent of the boy's mind, since he delighted to tell stories of his work in that part of the great Government machinery at Washington.

As for Frank, he had inherited his father's love for the army; and though he seldom committed himself on the subject, it could be seen plainly that some day, sooner or later, there would be another soldier in the patriotic Spencer family, striving to uphold the traditional honor of the name.

The town of Clayton, near which Bob and his brothers lived, was far in the interior; and this little river named the Juniper was the only body of water accessible to the boys; but that did not prevent Bob and Sam from dreaming of the happy day when they might gaze upon the tumbling billows of the great salt ocean, and have the dearest wish of their lives gratified.

Sam never tired of reading about foreign countries, which he hoped to see with his own eyes before many years; since nowadays life in the navy is not the drudgery it used to be, and through extensive travel can be made to form the basis of a liberal education.

A recent heavy rain had caused the river to swell beyond its customary summer dimensions, so that

there was a strong current, and many strange eddies besides.

But reckless boys seldom think of danger when a sudden desire to enjoy anything comes over them; and when Bob, being the first after all to strip, gave a leap from the bank, and dived head-first into the river, like a big frog, his only realization seemed to be that the water felt delightfully cool.

The others were fast upon his heels, and for some little time they splashed and dived and swam around, enjoying themselves as only care-free lads may.

"How about that race I proposed?" called out Bob, when they had worn off a little of their enthusiasm.

"Ready any time you say the word," replied Frank, who had beaten Bob in swimming, once upon a time, through some "fluke," and secretly cherished a forlorn hope that he might be able to do the same thing again though no one else dreamed that he had the least chance to come in ahead, with Bob doing his best.

"Fred, are you in the game with us?" demanded Bob.

"Why, I suppose I might make a start; but chances are I'll be left far behind before a quarter of the course is gone over. What is the goal to be, Bob?" asked the one who did not feel as much at home in the water as he did in that cozy old arm-

chair at home, with a big volume of Government reports on his knees.

"Up or down stream, Bob?" asked Frank, carelessly, as though it did not matter much to him which course they followed.

"Let's see," remarked the one who had proposed the race, "how would that willow tree around the second bend above do for the finishing stake?"

"Fine! Line up here, Fred, and get ready to make a start when Bob gives the word," and Frank made room for the third contestant, who knew he had not the least chance in the world yet was willing to lend encouragement to the project just to please the rest.

"Remember," called out the enthusiastic Bob, "the one who leaves the water opposite the willow, and touches the trunk of the tree, is the winner. And no climbing out on the bank beforehand, and racing to the goal along the bank, like Sam did once, and claimed to have won the title of champion. All ready? Then go!"

Immediately they jumped forward, and began to swim in the most energetic fashion possible, each according to his favorite method. Frank had a very strong way of pushing his body through the water, which is known as the "breast stroke;" while Bob nearly always used an overhand stroke whenever he really wished to make speed.

As for Fred, he tried first one way and then an-

other, without being able to hold his own with his more muscular brothers; so that from the start he fell far behind, and was being left more in the lurch with every minute, though continuing to swim lustily, not being easily discouraged.

Frank was managing somehow to keep almost even with Bob, and this encouraged him greatly, as doubtless the crafty "water-rat" intended should be the case. When the race had been some three-quarters covered, perhaps Bob would see fit to show his true form, and simply "walk away" from his nearest competitor.

Splashing, and striking out bravely, the lads kept on up the stream. It was no child's play, with such a heavy current against them; but difficulties only served to make them the more determined to carry out their full plans.

They had turned the first bend, and were striking out for the upper one, when a sound came floating to their ears that thrilled them instantly.

"Listen! What's that mean, Frank?" cried Bob, treading water, as he turned his anxious face toward the other, who had also stopped swimming for the moment.

"It sounded like a shout, as sure as you live, Bob!" spluttered Frank, who had gulped in more or less water in his sudden excitement. "Yes, there it is again! Do you think it can be Fred?" For the other brother was now far behind.

“He’s caught a cramp, perhaps!” exclaimed Bob, instantly starting down the current of the river, and swimming like mad, as the thought of the favorite brother in deadly peril spurred him to do his best.

CHAPTER II

THE BOY WHO KNEW HOW

ON other occasions Bob Spencer may have thought he had made fast time, but had any one been on the bank to observe him now, that person must have considered that he had all records broken. A human life was in peril, that of his favorite brother in the bargain; and this acted as an incentive for speed, such as no mere honors of an ordinary race could have done.

After him came Frank, also doing his best, yet finding himself but a poor second when compared with Bob.

Rounding the bend in the river, Bob saw instantly that his worst fears were realized. Fred was struggling desperately to keep his head above the surface, splashing at a tremendous rate, and evidently growing weaker with every passing second.

Twice he vanished from Bob's sight, even while the other was rapidly nearing the spot; though each time he came up again, his efforts to keep afloat diminishing all the while.

At last Bob found himself close by; and just then poor Fred sank for the third time. By a desperate plunge Bob was able to clutch hold of him before the current got in its full work.

Of course the drowning boy immediately attempted to cling desperately to his intended rescuer; for under such conditions self-preservation becomes the first law of nature. But Bob had many a time practiced life-saving, and knew exactly what to do, even though in an emergency he would be compelled to give the imperiled one a smart blow, in order to break his strangle-hold, since the lives of both depended on Bob's ability to keep his arms free.

Having secured just the grip he wished upon Fred, he started toward the shore, trying to keep the other's head above water as much as possible.

"Good! keep it up, Bob! I'll be there to help in a jiffy!" shouted Frank, who was coming along at a great rate, and was already near at hand.

Even had he been left to himself, Bob would have undoubtedly proven his ability to get his brother ashore; but all the same he did not scorn the assistance which the coming of Frank put in his way.

Together they pushed Fred to shallow water, and then lifted him out to the bank. Frank looked down on the white face of the dearly loved brother with dire dismay.

"Oh! is he really drowned, Bob?" he asked,

trembling, not with cold, but with the horror of the threatened calamity.

"Not a bit of it!" exclaimed Bob, though secretly he felt alarmed himself at the possibility of such a thing coming to pass. "Here, help me get him over on his face. We must pump the water out of him first, and get his blood circulating."

"Do you think we—think we can save him, Bob?" gasped Frank, as he tried to control the fit of shivering and trembling that had seized him.

"Think! I don't think—I know!" exclaimed Bob, with such energy that Frank, who had, several times before, seen his brother restore half-drowned persons to life, felt a return of confidence.

"He—he's awful still," Frank ventured.

"So would you be, if you had as much water in you as he's probably got! Come on, now, get busy!" cried Bob, briskly. "Turn him on his face!"

The two brothers rolled Fred over, Bob pulling up a clod of earth and grass to be used in place of the bundle of clothing sometimes put into play for the purpose of pressing on the stomach to eject the water. Then Bob knelt astride of the unconscious one, pulling Fred's arms up over his head.

"Come on, now!" called Bob to Frank. "Help me press on his ribs. We've got to force the water out of his lungs. Press in, and upward, on his short ribs. Come on!"

He spoke sharply to arouse Frank to action, and his brisk words had a good effect.

"Force the water out, and get some air in—that's what we've got to do!" panted Bob, as he worked beside his brother. "He'll be all right soon, Frank. Push harder—don't be afraid."

They worked feverishly, waiting anxiously for the first sign of returning consciousness.

"Rub his legs!" suddenly called Bob. "I can attend to his lungs now. I think he's coming around!"

Frank rubbed the limbs vigorously, to start up the sluggish circulation.

"Here he comes!" cried Bob, a moment later. There was a long-drawn, tremulous sigh from the lips of Fred, and his eyes slowly opened.

"Oh, is he—all right?" cried Frank.

"He will be, in a minute," replied Bob. "How are you, old sport?" he asked, half jokingly, though there was an undercurrent of anxiety in his voice.

"I—I'm better than I was," faltered Fred, faintly. He made a motion to sit up, and Bob put his arm back of him. "Did I—did I get a cramp?" he asked, gaspingly.

Bob nodded.

"I thought I felt it coming on," resumed Fred, his voice constantly growing stronger. "I tried to get to shore, but I couldn't. Did you two see me?"

"We sure did!" exclaimed Frank. "I thought

we'd never reach you in time. You ought to have seen Bob swim!" and he gazed admiringly at his brother.

"That's nothing," spoke Bob, modestly. "You're some little swimmer yourself, Frank."

"Nothing to you, though. You sure did cut through the water. You ought to have seen him, Fred!"

"I wish I had. But I was about all in. I thought sure I was a goner! But it must have been a hard swim for you, Bob."

"I should say it was!" echoed the enthusiastic Frank, as he patted Bob on his bare shoulder; "and nobody but our Bob here could ever have reached you in time, Fred, or brought you around so quickly. I tell you, Bob, you ought to be a life-saver, that's what!"

Bob smiled as he turned on the speaker, and said quietly:

"That's just what I've made up my mind I'll be, no matter what happens. I've always had the greatest wish to do stunts like this. I'm never tired of reading about Uncle Sam's brave fellows along the coast, and how they rescue shipwrecked sailors, and people, from vessels that have gone on the reefs, or the shoals, where the life line must be used to reach them. Just you wait, and some fine day I'm bound that I'll get there."

Frank and Fred looked at him with admiration.

“And believe me,” ventured the former, sturdily, “if ever you do get your wish, and join the life savers, you’ll make a success of the job; won’t he, Fred?”

“I’m sure of that,” the other went on, with a vim; “because he seems to have his whole heart set on such a life work. And you know father always says that a fellow can only do his level best when he takes up the work that appeals to him. He says there are too many round men in square holes.”

“And that’s what I think, too,” Frank returned. “Now, what use would it be for either of us to dream of doing such things as Bob here has in mind—you with your heart set on forest conservation, and all those great problems that Congress is wrestling with just now; and me bent on being worthy of wearing shoulder-straps like father’s some fine day, in the army?”

“Every one to his taste, say I,” Bob observed, complacently; while an eager light shone in his eyes; “and I mean to tease father right along until he gives me permission to join the coast guard. Already I know everything about handling a boat, and with a few lessons I surely ought to be able to do my part with an oar in a surf boat. And I reckon now that it would have to be some sea to give me a scare!”

“Nobody ever saw you show signs of being

afraid, Bob, and that's a fact," declared Frank, admiringly.

"That's been just the trouble," commented Fred, as he made an effort to get up on his feet, though he required a helping hand on either side, such was his weakness after his close call; "you're too daring for your own good. If you chanced to be a fireman, Bob, you'd never hesitate about rushing into a burning house, if you saw the chance."

"If there was any one in peril I think I'd be only too willing to go in, no matter what the danger," Bob admitted, carelessly. "Fact is, I never did know what it was to be afraid,—except to face father, after doing something I was ashamed of."

Frank and Fred exchanged looks, and smiled; for they knew only too well how often this same thing had happened; since it seemed as though reckless Bob could never refrain from playing mad pranks, that were fated to get him into a peck of trouble.

They had seen Colonel Spencer many a time looking reproachfully at his youngest and wildest boy; evidently at a loss to know just how to manage one with a disposition so reckless, and at the same time so lovable. Doubtless that same question had been debated scores of times with the sweet-faced mother; though up to now no solution had been found of the problem as to what should be done with Bob.

And perhaps the two brothers may have dimly suspected that in the end the boy himself might find an answer to the question; for they knew that his heart was assuredly bent on making the life-saving service his goal.

They knew that every day Bob eagerly searched the papers for accounts of wrecks, and that he kept a scrapbook of all such occurrences, which he studied constantly, so as to familiarize himself with the various ways in which the coast guard worked, when called upon to save human life.

Indeed, unbeknown to even his father, Bob had sent to Washington for a copy of the year book issued by the Treasury Department, covering all the work done by the life-saving service along the lakes, and the sea coast.

Thus Bob already knew just what a candidate must be proficient in to be admitted to this service; and hardly a day went by but that he practiced certain exercises, looking forward to the time when they would be of more or less benefit to him in passing his examination.

Slowly the three brothers made their way down the river bank to the spot where they had left their clothes; Frank and Bob steadying Fred from time to time, because the latter was still a bit shaky after his recent experience.

"I hope you won't say anything about this at home, boys," remarked Frank.

"You can count on me not to tell," replied Bob, instantly; for one of his best traits was an unwillingness to boast, after he had performed some really praiseworthy service.

"I suppose it would only make mother anxious," Fred said reflectively; "and while I'd like them to know how Bob saved me, perhaps we'd better keep mum about it. But I'll never forget it—never!"

He shuddered a little when saying this, for Fred knew what a close call he had had when all his energies seemed to be paralyzed by that terrible cramp in his leg.

Bob laughed, as though it was hardly worth mentioning.

"Why, it was only a little practice for me, I tell you," he affirmed; "only, of course I'd much rather have another subject to work on than my own brother. But as they say, 'all's well that ends well,' so let's forget about it."

"How about the race, Bob?" asked Fred, chuckling to hide his emotion, as he squeezed the arm that was twined so sturdily about him.

"Oh! that's all off!" replied the other, laughingly. "Frank can call it a draw, if he feels that way."

"Huh! much chance I'd have had with a fellow who can swim like you did when you went to the rescue of Fred here," grunted the other; "I thought I was doing pretty well, but now I know you were

just coaxing me along. When it comes to anything connected with the water there's only one Bob Spencer after all, and he stands in a class by himself."

"Hear! hear! so say we all of us!" declared Fred, as they started to don their clothes, every one of them with a song of thanksgiving in his heart.

CHAPTER III

WHEN BOB BROKE LOOSE

"WHAT'S all the row about down the street, I wonder, Chase?" Dave Spencer remarked, as he came out of a store with his chum, Chase Collins, one afternoon, several days after the events recorded in the preceding chapter; "seems like a crowd was collecting in a hurry, coming from every quarter. Perhaps the advance agent of the circus has struck town."

"More likely a mad dog has broke loose, for it's just hot enough to-day to start the rabies, I should think," grumbled the other, as he wiped his wet forehead with his handkerchief.

"Well, hardly, because in that case they'd all be running every-which-way like fun, instead of gathering in a bunch," Dave went on to say; and he had a way of reasoning out things that always made his opinion worth while.

"Guess you're right about that, Davy," grunted the other, as he looked again, and more closely; "then I'll try another guess, and say it's a dog fight. You know that always collects a crowd faster than anything else. I've even seen old Deacon

Small stand, watching, and looking like he hoped the smaller animal would win out."

"Wrong again, Chase, because no dog fight ever happened without a heap of noise. And the people all seem to be laughing, as if it might be something pretty funny."

"Let's move along that way, and find out about it for ourselves," suggested the other, sensibly.

"Done!" agreed Dave; and accordingly they started on a run toward the constantly-enlarging group.

The tailor and the shoemaker came out to look, and immediately went into convulsions of laughter. Then there was Miss Carson, the dressmaker, who seemed to be tremendously annoyed over something, and was scolding those who laughed. Altogether the two running lads had their curiosity fully aroused long before they found themselves in a position to learn what it was all about.

"Pigs!" gasped Dave, as an unmistakable series of grunts reached their ears.

"But what can there be about just plain ordinary porkers to make all this confusion, and set people to laughing so hard?" demanded Chase.

In another half-minute his question was answered. Through the crowd broke one of the strangest looking objects human eyes had ever fallen upon. It was a pig, but such a highly-decorated animal as would never be found outside of a

menagerie where they had a mandrill on exhibition.

Each separate leg of the rooter had been artistically painted a different color. One was green, another black, a third yellow and the last one a vivid purple. And a pretty fair representation of the Star Spangled Banner had been daubed on each of his sides; so that he certainly did present the most ridiculous appearance of any creature that had ever appeared at large on the streets of Clayton.

Hardly had he kicked his hind legs in the air, and made off down the street, as the hot sun caused the turpentine in the paint to burn him a little, than a second grotesque animal pushed into view. If anything he looked more remarkable than the other pig; and certainly he gave more vigorous kicks while running after his mate, both of them squealing and grunting at a great rate, as though not appreciating all the attention they were receiving.

"Well, what d'ye think of that, now?" gasped Chase, when he could catch his breath, after laughing until the tears came in his eyes.

"I guess everybody knows whose pigs those are," remarked a bystander. "Week in and week out they've been a nuisance to the whole community. Miss Carson has been asked time and again to keep 'em penned up; but somehow they always just manage to get out on the common each day. They played hob with my garden; and like as not lots of other people can tell the same story. Somebody

must have got tired of it all, and played this trick on their owner. Whew! just listen how she's tellin' all she means to do to the culprit, if ever she finds out who he is."

"Don't you forget it, Mr. Calkins," cried the maiden lady, sharply, for her ears were keen enough to catch what the neighbor had said, "I'm pretty sure right now who I've got to thank for this detestable prank. There hain't a boy in town that'd think of such a thing half as quick as that scapegrace of a Bob Spencer. I'm going to complain to his father right away, see if I don't. Think what a job I've got a-scrapin' of all that paint off the backs of my poor little innocent pigs."

"Mebbe if they was safe and sound in their pen, such accidents as upsettin' paint pots over themselves wouldn't happened, Miss Carson," suggested one man; but the indignant spinster only gave him a disdainful look, and hastened to vanish inside her doorway; upon reaching which she beckoned to a colored man, and sent him, not upon a wild goose chase, but in search of a pair of animated color schemes.

"How about that, Dave; think Bob did it?" asked Chase, turning on his chum.

Dave shrugged his shoulders, and even grinned, as he replied in a low tone, not wishing any one to overhear him:

"Well, now, I wouldn't put it past Bob, because

he sure does seem to have a failing that way. And between us, Chase, I remember hearing him say only yesterday, after those pigs broke into our yard, and played the mischief with things, that it was queer *somebody* couldn't find a way to make Miss Carson keep 'em shut up. Looks like Bob had set his wits to work, meaning to help out the whole neighborhood."

"That's just like Bob," asserted Chase, with a chuckle; "he's a public benefactor. But I wonder what'll happen to him when Miss Carson makes her complaint to the colonel. Your dad is a pretty stern man, you know, Davy."

"But he's human to the core; and often you'll discover a twinkle in his eyes, even when he's giving one of us a lecture. And then everybody knows just what a nuisance those two pigs have been for weeks. Of course Bob won't deny it, if father asks him; because he was never known to tell a lie; and that's more than a heap of other boys, that pretend to have better reputations than Bob, can say. But between us, I don't think Miss Carson will ever say a word to father. He's a lawyer, and has a way of showing up people's small ways at times. She'll cool down a bit, and I hope keep her pigs where they belong after this."

It turned out just as Dave had said. There was no complaint made to Bob's father; and if he ever heard of the episode at all, it must have come

through other channels. But few people in Clayton doubted that Bob's hand was the one by means of which those queer freaks were turned loose upon the streets of the town, in order to teach the stubborn spinster a much-needed lesson.

The boy was so full of a desire for excitement in some form or other that it just seemed as though he had to break loose once in awhile. After he had had his fun, Bob would remain quiet for a certain season; but everyone knew that once in so often they might expect to hear something out of the common from prank-playing Bob Spencer.

Just one week after the affair of the painted pigs the usually quiet town of Clayton was treated to another sensation; this time not so very humorous either, as viewed from the standpoint of the average citizen.

It was a dark night. Clouds were sweeping across the heavens, and only occasionally did any star venture to peep timidly out through a rent in the drifting curtain of vapor above.

As a rule ten o'clock found every store in town tightly closed, and few persons could be met on the streets after that hour, unless there was something unusual going on.

The circus had come and gone, so that Clayton had relapsed into its customary repose; and as midnight drew near not a solitary soul could be seen upon the streets.

Suddenly there sounded a doleful clang from the bell in the tower of the church nearest the common. It rang out with startling distinctness on the still night air, and was speedily followed by a second, and still a third stroke.

At the first stroke all good male citizens sat bolt upright in bed, and listened. With the second came visions of a fire, that, with such a wind blowing, might threaten many frame buildings. And hardly had the third struck than men were groping about in the darkness for their outer garments, and trying to pull on obstinate shoes, in the frantic endeavor to get abroad, and do their duty to the community as fire fighters.

From every direction men, women and children came pouring, all anxiously calling out to ask where the fire might be; for in no quarter could they discover such plain signs as would be apt to betray its presence.

Then followed the greatest confusion. No one seemed to understand what it was all about; and while the crowd grew steadily larger, all sorts of speculations were indulged in as to the meaning of the wild alarm.

"Let's go to the church and ask the sexton, Mr. Conway, why he's ringing the bell like that?" called out one man, presently, as the doleful sounds still continued.

"Here I am, gentlemen," sang out a quavering

voice, "Sol Conway, and I hain't ever be'n nigh the church this blessed night. See, here's the key I'm a-carryin' right at this minute. I always said they was speerits up in that belfry tower, and my wife she laughed at me for speakin' my mind. Reckon now she'll think the same as I do about it."

"To the church!" shouted many others; "let's find out who's playing this trick on us all!" and with that there was an immediate rush toward the sacred edifice.

With trembling fingers old Sol unlocked the door, and as a lantern was held up, they could see the bell rope violently moved with each brazen clang of the bell above; but not a living person was in sight.

"Some joker has climbed up in the tower!" suggested one man.

"That's what it looks like!" said another; "close around, everybody, so he can't get away. We'll soon find out what it means. Here, I want another man to go up there with me. Who'll volunteer?"

Quickly two men started to ascend the ladder leading into the tower; while those below and outside waited to hear some sort of disturbance that would announce the capture of the rogue. The bell continued to clang at regular intervals; and presently the two investigators came hastily down, much faster than they had ascended.

"There hain't a livin' soul up there!" declared one of the men, in what sounded like an awed tone.

“ We felt all around, and couldn’t find a sign of any one; and right along the bell would give a jerk, and ring like it was possessed of an evil spirit. Just listen to that, will you? ” Even as he spoke the bell once more sounded, sending a thrill through everyone’s veins.

CHAPTER IV

THE GHOST IN THE BELFRY TOWER

"It's a ghost!" was heard in several quarters.

Some of the timid ones hurried away, to shut themselves up in their houses; but many of the braver ones scoffed at the idea of there being anything supernatural about the occurrence.

"Let me have that lantern, Mr. Scroggins, and I'll go up to investigate," announced Frank Spencer; for, with numerous other town boys, he had been drawn to the spot by all the clamor.

Several more declared their willingness to ascend, if only they had light; and so the lantern was given into the charge of Frank, who immediately started up the ladder into the dusty belfry tower, with equally valiant chums dogging his footsteps.

Once they gained a position there, they started to look around. The bell gave a loud clang, after a wheezy effort; and Frank's quick ear detected some sort of grinding noise at one end of the wooden structure.

"Whatever it is makes the old bell ring," he declared, "it must lie over in this quarter. Come and see what we can find, fellows."

Half a minute later and there was a cry from one of the boys.

"Look up yonder, Frank!" he exclaimed, pointing eagerly as he spoke; "don't you see something creepy there?"

"A snake, mebbe!" exploded another boy, starting back in alarm.

"Not much," remarked Frank, with a little laugh. "I reckon the mystery is explained all right, boys. That's a rope, and it runs straight out over the limb of that big elm yonder, and then some. At the other end you'll find the *ghost* that's been ringing the bell all this while."

"Well, ain't that a rich sell, though?" ejaculated another of the boys; for once the mystery was solved none of them could see any reason for feeling in the least bit timid.

"Notice which way it runs, Frank," suggested another; "and then we'll go down and close in on the fellow, whoever he may be."

"Oh! I rather think he's taken the alarm already," replied Frank; "because, you notice that the bell has stopped ringing. But as you say, Harold, we might find out just where he's been lying all this while, laughing at what was going on. Get a move on, fellows, and drop down out of this owl roost."

When they reached the outside of the church again, all manner of silly questions were showered

upon them; but none of the boys stopped long enough to make answer. They hurried after Frank, who, lantern in hand, had started on a run toward a certain fence corner that he remembered lay in the direction where that rope trailed.

"There he goes!" shrilled one of the boys, as a dimly-seen figure sprang out of the bushes and quickly vanished in the gloom beyond.

"After him, everybody!" chirped another fellow; but somehow no one seemed very much inclined to take up the chase.

"No use trying to overtake that chap, with the lead he's got, and the darkness to help him," declared Frank. "But here's the rope all right, just as I expected; and you can see how he crouched down in this fence corner, and gave a pull whenever he wanted to."

They looked around, and could plainly see where the unknown had knelt down, for his knees and toes had made plain impressions in the soil.

"What's this?" exclaimed one of the boys, suddenly, as he stooped and picked up something that had caught his eye. "It's a handkerchief, Frank, and chances are that fellow must have dropped it."

"Let me have it," said Frank, quietly, and without hesitation the finder handed the article over to the one holding the lantern, and who was the leader in the quest for the offender.

When Frank found a chance to examine that

handkerchief, he discovered, just as he had more than half expected he would, that it bore the significant initials R. S.; and this told him the whole story, for he knew that he held the property of his reckless brother, Bob!

Meanwhile there were loud threats as to what ought to be done to put a stop to such mad pranks as were becoming almost a weekly occurrence these days. No names were mentioned, yet every one could easily imagine who was meant. And when Frank slipped away from the rest to slink back home, that tell-tale pocket handkerchief burned like fire in his possession.

He knew that Bob was the guilty one, and what worried him most of all was what their father might be tempted to do when he heard the rumors that would soon be flying about Clayton.

The Spencers had quite an estate just out of town, and the five brothers were allowed many privileges, such as most boys seldom know; for the colonel believed in young lads being given a chance to develop any latent talents they might possess.

Thus Fred and Dave dabbled in a wireless outfit; and all but Fred owned bicycles, had interests in boats of various models, and were members in good standing of the baseball and football organizations of the town.

Watching his chance after breakfast that morning, Frank beckoned to Bob, and led the way out

to the gymnasium where they were wont to amuse themselves at various times with all manner of athletic appliances.

"What is it, Frank?" asked Bob, watching his older brother uneasily out of one corner of his eye, for doubtless he expected that he was about to be questioned with regard to his whereabouts on the preceding night.

"That belongs to you, doesn't it?" asked Frank, suddenly tossing the tell-tale handkerchief to his brother.

"It does. Where did you find it?" questioned the other, blandly.

"It was picked up in a certain fence corner last night, and I got hold of it before Alec Rand could discover your initials," replied Frank, quietly, his gaze fastened upon his brother's face.

Bob turned red. He laughed a bit uneasily, but there was little of humor about the sound.

"Oh! I'm ready to own up to you, Frank," he said, nervously. "I thought it would be great fun to get the whole town guessing what made that bell sound; but before I was done with it, I give you my word I was sorry I'd gone into the prank. You see, I never figured on frightening nervous people. I suppose father is bound to hear some talk about me, because there never is a thing done these days but what some persons want to saddle it all on me. What do you want of me, Frank?"

"There's only one thing for you to do, Bob," replied the other, regretfully; for as a boy himself he could appreciate the humorous side of the affair, though he knew Colonel Spencer would be very much provoked at hearing complaints again in connection with one of his sons.

"You mean that I'd do well to take the bull by the horns, and tell father before he hears it from any one else?" remarked Bob, slowly, and with a frown on his face; for this was always a hard thing for him to do—face the father who had been so kind and indulgent, and whose confidence he had so often rather abused.

"That's what I'd advise," Frank said, quickly. "It'll take some of the sting out of it for father to hear the story straight from you."

"All right, then, I'll do it, though this is more than I counted on when I laid out to puzzle the good people of sleepy old Clayton," announced the culprit.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," declared his brother. "And let me tell you, when Casper Bland and another man came hurrying down from the tower, to tell how they had searched it all over, and could find no living being there, while the bell kept on tolling, there were some pretty badly frightened people in that crowd. But when we took a lantern up, we soon found your rope, which Mrs. Bridget Flannigan identified as the clothes-line she left

strung in her back yard. Well, you had your fun, Bob, and now I know you're equal to standing for the penalty; only don't wait too long, or some busy-body will get ahead of you."

"Father hasn't gone to his office yet, has he?" demanded the other; "then I'll be apt to catch him in the library; but I do hope mother will be kept busy in the kitchen with the hired girl, for I shouldn't want her to hear what I've got to tell. The pained look in her eyes always haunts me. Many's the time I have vowed to stop this foolishness because of her feeling so badly; but somehow it just seems to break loose once in so often. If they would only let me do what I want, and join the life-saving service, I'm sure it would come to an end, because then I'd have an outlet for this bottled-up energy. I'm going now, Frank."

And he did, as straight as anything, with Frank watching his course to the library, and nodding his head with satisfaction; for at least Bob had the merit of being ready to face the music, whenever he had done mischief.

What happened there no one else ever knew; but when Bob came out, he looked unusually sober, and all that day he kept aloof from his brothers, wandering through country lanes on his bicycle, as though wrapped up in his reflections.

When he reached home that evening it was to find that Uncle David had dropped in for a brief

visit. He was a very busy officer in Uncle Sam's Secret Service, yet once in a while he found an opportunity to visit Clayton, and see his folks for a short time.

Of course all the news of the town was soon re-tailed for the amusement of Uncle David, and thus he was told of the night alarm that had brought everybody out, when the church bell tolled in such a mysterious fashion, and folks had begun to think it the work of spirits.

And that night, after all the boys had gone to their rooms, there was a very serious consultation in the library between Bob's parents and the uncle.

"Listen to what I'm going to say, brother," remarked Uncle David, soberly. "That boy is not bad in the least, but just filled to the brim with a desire for nervous excitement. Give it to him. Let him have his heart's wish, and join the life-saving service. He is young, but splendidly built, and equipped for the work. I know the General Superintendent, in Washington, very well, and if you say the word I'll try to see if we can get Bob the appointment. It will be excellent training for the boy, and knock this nonsense out of his head, believe me."

Colonel Spencer glanced toward his wife, whose gentle eyes were filled with tears she could not suppress. But she knew that her husband was capable of deciding on what was best, so she simply hid her

face in her hands, and left the settlement all to him.

“I’m already half inclined to take you at your word, David,” said Bob’s father; “it might look like heroic treatment, but as you say, if all turns out well, it is going to be the making of the boy. Yes, I think you may see the General Superintendent when you go back to Washington, and write me as to the results.”

CHAPTER V

GLORIOUS NEWS

“WHERE’S Bob? I want to ask him about something,” and as Dave said this he dropped down alongside Frank and Sam, who were lounging under the favorite apple tree not far from the house.

It was about nine o’clock on the morning following the coming of Uncle Dave; and the latter busy gentleman had already slipped off to the station, having received a wire to the effect that his presence was immediately needed at headquarters in Washington; for as may be remembered, he was attached to the Secret Service, and handled many of the important cases of the Government.

“Oh! father hasn’t gone to the office yet, though it’s long past his regular hour; and he sent Janice out to say he wanted to have a talk with Bob,” remarked Sam; “I’m afraid the boy’s been up to some more of his pranks, for mother looked tearful this morning, and I noticed that she watched Bob all through breakfast.”

“Oh! the worst is over, so far as that goes,” remarked Frank, with a chuckle; “for I coaxed Bob

yesterday to go in and confess all about it. Still, this may have something to do with that bell-tolling business—a sort of after-clap, as you might call it.”

“Hello! then that *was* some of Bob’s work, was it?” ejaculated Sam, with a grin; for he was a genuine boy, big fellow that he seemed, and could appreciate a lark as well as the next one, though never as a rule engaging in such things himself.

“To tell you the honest truth,” Dave admitted, after he and Sam had laughed over the account of how the fellows accompanying Frank up into the belfry tower had been alarmed when they found no one there, and yet heard the bell clang in that mysterious way, “I suspected that Bob might have a finger in that pie, for the simple reason that there isn’t another fellow in Clayton equal to carrying out so clever a scheme; but I didn’t mean to say anything about it. And since then he has kept so much to himself that I began to get bothered.”

“But it’s all plain now, you see,” remarked Sam.

“Yes, if Bob had to confess to father I can easily understand how mean he must feel over it,” Dave went on to say, frowning. “That’s always the way with poor Bob; he starts so many things just on the impulse of the moment, and then calls himself a fool afterwards for doing them. But what do you suppose father wants to see him about again this morning? I hope he hasn’t been up to more mischief?”

“That’s just what I’m wondering about,” Frank

observed, thoughtfully; "and every minute I'm expecting to see Bob come out this way. To tell you the truth, I'm of the opinion that Uncle Dave's hurry visit of last night may have something to do with all this business."

"What's this you've got on your mind, Frank?" demanded Dave, suspiciously.

"Hold your horses, and have a little patience," chuckled Frank. "You're always so good at ferretting out things, Dave, set your wits to work now, and solve the puzzle, while we're sitting here waiting for Bob to come along with news!"

Dave looked at him with widening eyes.

"You either know a lot more than you'll admit, Frank," he said, slowly; "or else you go away ahead of me in guessing things. Perhaps, now, you saw Uncle Dave before he slipped away this morning, while most of us were asleep; and mebbe he put a little flea into that sharp ear of yours. Now, own up!"

"There's no need!" burst out Sam just then, "for here comes Bob on the run; and as sure as you live he's burning up with wanting to tell us something."

"Then there *is* something in the wind," muttered Dave, as he turned to watch the brother mentioned approaching the spot where they were sprawled under the apple tree, and noticed how his face was brimful of excitement.

Bob upon reaching the others dropped down beside them.

"Well, what's happened to make you look that way?" demanded Sam, impetuously.

"I've got news for you,—the greatest news ever!" gasped Bob, turning to look at first one of them, and then each of the others; "and think how lucky it was for me that Uncle Dave just happened to drift along here at the right time. He put it up to father, and started the ball rolling. When I heard what was in the wind I nearly lost my breath, I tell you."

"Well, we're going to lose ours, too, if you keep on waiting much longer before telling all about this wonderful thing that's happened to you," declared Sam, who was a bit impatient in his way.

"Then listen, fellows," said Bob, triumphantly, "I'm going to join the life-saving service—that is, if I can pass the examination successfully, and Uncle Dave has enough influence with the superintendent in Washington to have me taken on; for as a rule boys are not allowed to serve Uncle Sam as surfmen, you know."

"Bully for you, and for Uncle Dave too!" exclaimed Sam, throwing up his hat in sudden ecstasy.

"And I'm more than glad to be named after such a trump as Uncle Dave!" declared the other brother, with equal enthusiasm. "I knew there was something brewing, from the way he and father and

mother stayed up so long after the rest of us had gone to bed. I could hear the sound of their voices down in the library when the town clock was striking eleven. And so that's what it's all about, is it, Bob? You can be sure that ~~w~~e're all of us just crazy with delight over your good luck, even if we will miss you terribly here at home. But then we're all getting on in years, and it won't be long before the rest of us will be wanting to fly away from the home nest."

"But do you think you can answer the requirements?" asked Sam, anxiously.

"I reckon I can—that is, if my size counts for anything, and Uncle Dave can influence the people at Washington to overlook my lack of years," replied Bob, promptly. "You know how I've been studying up on this subject right along. I can pull an oar as well as any man; and if I do say it myself, there are few fellows who feel more at home in the water than I do."

"But what is a life-saver expected to do?" asked Dave. "For I own up that so far I've taken little interest in the matter, though after this I'll feel more like investigating, now that I'm likely to have a brother in the service."

"Why, you see," Bob went on to explain, with the greatest eagerness possible; "there are stations located all along both seaboards, as well as on the Great Lakes, where, during certain portions of the

year, crews of surfmen are on constant duty, patrolling the beach from sunset to sunrise, for a distance of some two miles on either side of the station. And if the day is foggy they have to keep it up then the same way, for that is the dangerous time with coasting vessels that lose their bearings, and come too close to the sand flats or the reefs."

"Well, that sounds interesting, anyhow," remarked Dave. "And in case a surfman does discover a vessel in danger, what will he do?"

"Why, you see, every patrolman carries Coston signals with him at all times. If he sees a vessel nearing a danger point he lights a flare to warn the captain off. It gives a brilliant steady fire for about two minutes or so. And if the ship is already on the bar or the reef this tells the wrecked mariners that their plight is known, and that the patrolman is about to hurry off for assistance."

"Go on, tell us some more, Bob," urged Sam, who was especially interested, since some day, sooner or later, he hoped to be aboard a Government vessel, ploughing the broad seas, when this information might be of great value to him.

"If the wreck is close at hand the life boat is launched from the ways at the station," continued the eager applicant for a position in Uncle Sam's service. "But in case it happens to be at some distance away, then the lighter surfboat is hauled overland to a point opposite the scene of danger,

and launched there. Of course the surfmen are so well trained in getting a boat out over the breakers that they can manage what would seem next to impossible to most fellows. And that's where I'll have to put in my best licks practicing, because I've never been through any sort of surf. But it won't scare me a whit—no siree!”

“I should think not,” asserted Frank, confidently, for no one had ever seen Bob show the white feather on any occasion. “But after the boat is launched, what then?”

“Why,” the eager Bob went on to say, “they row out to the wreck, and take the people off, one at a time, women and children first, if there are any. No baggage or goods will be allowed in the boat as long as a single life remains to be saved.”

“But sometimes the surf must be so wild that it would be impossible to launch anything in the shape of a boat; isn't that so?” demanded Dave.

“Sure thing,” replied the other, “and they are all prepared for such times. Every life-saving station is fully supplied with boats, wreck guns, beach apparatus, restoratives, and all such things. A shot with a small line attached is fired directly across the wrecked vessel. Those on board are expected to haul on this line until they get hold of a tail block, with a whip or endless line rove through it. This tail block is hauled aboard as quickly as possible, to avoid having the whip drift off with the

set of the current, or foul with the wreckage, you see."

"I remember now," interrupted Sam, eagerly; "they fasten the block to the mast, and haul a hawser aboard from the shore, which will bring the breeches buoy along; and then one by one the wrecked sailors can go ashore. Am I right, Bob?"

"That's about how it stands, though there are a heap of things about it that I'm too excited to explain just now. Perhaps when I'm on duty I may write out the whole program for you in a letter. But just to think how anxious I'll be till father gets word from Uncle Dave! The days will seem like years; but I feel so sure of going that I mean to spend pretty much all my time laying plans. And fellows, take it from me that I'm done with my foolish ways from this time on. You see, father told me that this life-saving business was too serious to allow of any pranks; and I promised him, with my hand held up just like this, that I'd turn over a new leaf. When a fellow expects to serve the Government in a responsible position it's time he takes himself seriously."

"Hear! hear! Good for you, Bob, old fellow!" exclaimed Dave, clapping the other heartily on the back.

But although Bob was certainly in earnest in his resolution to avoid giving his parents any further cause for anxiety or distress of mind, circumstances

arose in the near future through which he found himself forced into a situation whereby his name was on everybody's lips.

And even though Uncle Dave might be successful in his personal application to headquarters of the Life Saving Service at Washington, the people of Clayton were not likely soon to forget Bob Spencer.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRE

CLANG! Clang! Clang!

Once again did the sound of a bell loudly rung awaken the folks of Clayton. Some of them raised their heads, listened; and then with a grunt simply rolled over again, once more to go to sleep, muttering that while you might "fool all the people some of the time, and some of them all the time, you couldn't hoodwink *all* the people *all* the time."

The Spencer boys were among the very first to bounce out from the covers; for they occupied two big adjoining rooms.

"Fire!" shrilled Sam, excitedly.

"Mebbe so," remarked the more cautious Dave, as he poked his head through the open doorway connecting the dormitories; "but tell me first where's Bob?"

"Oh! I'm here all right," chuckled the party mentioned, "getting dressed as quick as I can, let me tell you. I reckon that's a fire, all the same, unless some of the other fellows in town have taken up my job of amusing people."

"So much for a bad example, you see," declared Frank. Like the rest of them he was throwing on his clothes just as speedily as he could.

Probably there is nothing, even the coming of a circus to town, that excites the average boy quite so much as to be aroused at dead of night by the wild alarm of the fire bell, or the pounding of the steel engine-wheel rim that serves as a fire gong in many a country town.

When Sam started forth his four brothers were close at his heels. It mattered little that several of them were only partly dressed, and pulling on jackets as they ran; for the main thing was to get on the scene as quickly as possible. Who wants to miss even a part of the excitement, when fires only come rarely to country communities?

Others were headed that way too, for presently they met several more boys; and there were men on the run too, though many of the strapping fellows of the town had to respond to the summons of the bell, being fire laddies.

There was little trouble in deciding where the conflagration must be. Already a red glow was lighting up the clouds overhead, a ruddy painting of the heavens that gave the boys fresh cause for eagerness and anxiety.

"It's the old Scruggins mill, that's what!" ventured Fred, who often wandered about the country in his search for objects that excited his

interest along the line of Nature study, and who knew considerable about the lay of the land.

"No 'tain't, either," gasped Sam; "because that lies a little further to the West of where this fire is."

"Guess you're right, Sam," admitted Fred, always ready to own up when he had reason to believe himself on the wrong tack.

"There, did you see that tongue of flame rise up above the trees?" burst out Frank. "Whew! this is going to be some fire, believe me, fellows!"

"Oh! I don't know," came from Dave, who was tagging along close in the rear, and as usual using his thinking apparatus, "seems to me it might only be that ramshackle house belonging to Old Tate, who owns so much property around Clayton."

"Bully for you, Dave!" cried Frank; "you've hit the right nail on the head."

"That's what he has," added Chase Collins, Daye's chum, who was coming back of the Spencer boys; "it's sure the haunted house, as we used to call the old place. And some people I know will be glad if it does go up in smoke. Wonder now if any fellow could have sneaked out there to-night, and put a match to the same? Some of that tricky Webster crowd used to call it their club-house a while back. Mebbe they got to smokin', and started things going."

"Oh! shucks, you're away off there, Chase," said

Dave, who seemed to know everything that was going on around town; "don't you remember that the women got after Old Tate, and begged him to either tear down the old building, or else fix it up half-way decent, so somebody could live in it? And as he never likes to throw his cigar butts away, but rams 'em in his pocket to use in his pipe at home, why he had the carpenters just patch the haunted house up a bit. And I've heard tell that a family named Bodkins has been campin' out there a month back."

"Wow! and didn't I hear mother and Janice telling about them having a bunch of children, too?" cried Sam, who had a very tender heart.

"Hurry, fellows!" shouted Bob, at hearing this piece of news, which seemed to excite him very much. Although the others certainly strained every nerve and muscle, Bob outstripped them in the race easily.

Shortly afterwards all came in sight of the fire. It was an impressive sight to any lad, and the Spencer boys were so constituted that anything of this kind appealed strongly to them.

The old two-story building that had been patched up by the miserly landlord, Old Tate, was certainly going up in flame and smoke at last, as many persons had long ago predicted it would, sooner or later.

"Say, look at her burn, would you!" cried Chase

Collins, who still hung on to the rear of the racing group of boys.

"Going like a house afire is an old saying!" called back Frank over his shoulder.

"But see Bob, he's there already!" remarked Fred. "Did you ever know anybody to get over the ground like he does?"

"When there's anything worth while going on; or else somebody's chasing after him in a hurry, Bob sure can give points to the rest of the crowd," Dave admitted.

When the panting lads arrived near the blazing house they found an excited group there. Some of the neighbors had evidently reached the scene before the town fellows, and from the sight of a lot of wretched furniture scattered about the open space these kind-hearted people must have pitched right in, endeavoring to rescue whatever was possible before the fire made a clean sweep of things.

But now it was too late to do anything more in this line, for the old building was so dry and seasoned that it burned like tinder; and smoke was pouring out of nearly every door and window.

Even when the firemen did arrive with their apparatus the chances were they could do little or nothing to save the house, which was plainly doomed. Still, no doubt they would make a great holiday of the occasion, smashing all the windows with their fire axes, and climbing on the roof of

the porch to send a stream of water into the blazing interior, until the contents of the cistern had been exhausted; after which they would stand around and watch the shell of the building fall into the mass of red ashes, telling of other fires where they had been able to at least save the adjoining houses.

Frank, looking around, quickly picked out the family who had been occupying the fated house, and whom Dave had spoken of as "the Bodkinses"

The father seemed to be a lame man, whom they afterwards discovered had himself been quite a fire-fighter in one of the cities; and being permanently injured in the pursuit of his business had been retired on half pay, moving to the country in the hope of living better on a small income, with a garden, and chickens, and a cow in prospect another year.

The mother was a large woman, evidently quite capable of managing a family; and around her were clustered half a dozen youngsters of all ages, partly dressed, with their eyes seemingly popping out of their heads as they watched their home go up in the grip of their father's old enemy, Fire.

Frank wondered who would be good enough to invite the poor, stricken family home to spend the balance of the night, and keep them until they could find some other vacant habitation. He knew his mother was tender-hearted, and meant to take it upon himself, if his father did not show up, to see what could be done for them.

All this while the fire was crackling away, and spreading to other parts of the house, which before very long would be a complete wreck.

"What ails the boys with the machine?" called out one man, as he listened in vain to catch the usual boisterous shouts announcing the coming of the Clayton Hook and Ladder Company.

"Hey! Scrubby Jones, who's just come along, says as how they got mired in Shuster Bottoms, where the creek spreads over the road and makes a mudhole," a panting boy answered him.

That caused a general laugh for, as it was not their house that was afire, most of those present felt that they could enjoy anything in the way of fun that came along.

"Oh! they'll be here yet," announced another loyal adherent of the fire company.

"Sure, in time to throw the contents of the cistern on the ashes; might as well all go together," jeered another fellow.

"Whew! look at her jump, will you?" cried Sam Spencer, as a sudden spurt of fire shot upward, with a slight shift in the wind which had started to blow at a more lively rate.

Frank was glancing over the wretched array of stuff that had been dragged out of the reach of the flames.

"No piano-player there, nor yet a talking machine, or a china closet," he said to Bob, who

chanced to be close by, possibly also interested in seeing what the Bodkins family would have, to start housekeeping again. "But then I reckon these old things are just about as precious to them as mother's best china is in her eyes."

"I shouldn't wonder, Frank," replied Bob, shaking his head. "Too bad, for they seem to be a pretty nice family too. I like the looks of some of the youngsters; don't you? And Mr. Bodkins seems as if he might be a man with something in his head. Too bad he's crippled so. Dave was just telling me he used to be a fireman in the city, and got hurt in a big blaze, where he saved the life of his chief at the risk of his own. I'd like to know that man, and I will if I don't get away soon from Clayton."

"What ails his wife, do you think?" suddenly demanded Frank. "Look at her carrying on like she's been taken with a fit, wringing her hands and crying! Everybody's running that way, so come on, let's see what's happened!"

Bob hastened after his older brother. He thought it strange that the woman, who up to then had seemed to be taking things much more composedly than her lame husband, should so suddenly give way. Could it be that she had remembered something valuable that she had forgotten in the excitement and haste of making a speedy exit from the burning building? That would be too bad, for the

chances were now it was far too late to think of rushing in there just to hunt for an old family heirloom or two.

But when the boys came nearer the group they heard words uttered that gave them a severe shock.

"It's the Bodkins baby!" cried one woman, who had come hurrying over from the nearest farmhouse. "The mother told the oldest darter to fetch it out, and she was that frightened she never looked in the crib, but just snatched it up and came that way. All the while they've been thinkin' the baby was asleep in *there*; but it ain't so, and now the mother remembers that she took it in bed with her. And it's been forgot in all the rush! Oh! my stars, did you ever hear of such a terrible thing? Poor little baby, smothered and burned in that awful fire!"

"What's all that?" cried Bob Spencer, as he came rushing up. "Do you mean to tell me there's somebody been left behind in the house?"

"Yes," volunteered a bystander, "they say it's the little baby, asleep under the bed covers. They all had the notion it'd been carried out in the crib. Never knowed different till just now, when the oldest gal went to see how it was gettin' on, and found the crib empty!"

Bob jumped toward the spot where the mother stood—the centre of a wildly-excited crowd, wring-

ing her hands, and crying as though her heart would break:

“My poor baby! Oh! won’t somebody go in and bring her out before it’s too late? If John wasn’t so crippled that he can hardly move you’d see him take chances. He never knew what it was to be afraid of anything, when he was able. It’s my baby, I tell you! Oh! is everybody a coward, that you can hear a mother asking you to save her precious little one, and not a man of you make a move?”

Some of them writhed under these words. But they turned and looked at the burning house, and remembered that they had wives and children themselves at home, to whom their lives were worth considerable. At any rate it seemed as though it must be a reckless thing for anyone to even dream of rushing into all that fire and smoke, to grope around, and perhaps fall a victim.

A baby’s life was well worth saving, but——

Bob Spencer gave one look at the fire. Then he pushed his way into the midst of the crowd around the almost distracted mother. If he was going to be a life-saver on the sea, that should not debar him from starting in ashore.

“Tell me how to get to the room where you left the baby!” he said to the woman.

She looked at him. Perhaps admiration shone

in her eyes, but it was almost immediately overshadowed by fear.

"Oh! you're only a boy, and you've got a mother of your own!" she wailed, again wringing her hands.

"Tell him what he asks," said a man standing nearby. "That's Bob Spencer!" just as though those few words had a world of meaning; and in all his life Bob never felt prouder than just then, to know that despite his bad record for practical jokes, folks *did* believe in his natural bravery.

Quickly she explained how the stairs lay just beyond the open door, and that it was in the room to the left at the end of the hall above that the baby lay.

"Take care, Bob, remember!" Frank urged his reckless brother, as with white face he saw him start toward the blazing house.

And Bob, turning to send one reassuring glance back over his shoulder as he ran, simply called out cheerily:

"Oh! I'll be all right, Frank; watch how easy it can be done!" But, nevertheless, Frank's heart seemed in his throat as he saw his brother vanish amidst the smoke.

CHAPTER VII

IN HIS LINE OF BUSINESS

“WHO was that went in there?” asked a man who had just come up in time to see the vanishing figure of Bob as he rushed into the house, having first taken the precaution to dabble his handkerchief in the water trough nearby, and tie it over his mouth and nostrils.

“It’s Bob Spencer, and he’s gone in to try and find the baby that was forgotten in the rush to get out!” another informed him.

“Well, he’s a brave one, all right,” the newcomer admitted, “and I’ve heard tell of some of his doings, both good and bad, before now; but I’m afraid his mother will have cause to weep, as well as that forgetful one yonder, who could let her baby stay behind while she was trying to save herself.”

Frank heard this kind of talk all around him, but he paid little notice to what was said. His whole attention was taken up in watching for the first sign of his brother Bob, who had ventured to accept the terrible chances, simply through his love for daring, and because he had been touched by the grief of the heart-broken mother.

"Let's get closer, and p'raps we might be able to help him," suggested Dave; for somehow the brothers seemed to have come together at this dreadful moment, when one of their number had voluntarily placed himself in danger.

"Yes," added Frank, "he might manage to get to the room where the baby was left, but find himself cut off from going back again. Then, you see, we might be on hand to help. Here, boys, pick up some of these bedclothes lying in a heap, who knows but what they might come in handy?"

Several men saw what he meant, and were quick to take a hint, each of them snatching up a blanket or a comfortable, as the chance offered. Then they pushed up as close to the wall of the building as they could, keeping watchful eyes on the windows above in the hope of discovering signs of Bob.

Frank had heard what the woman said about the room where she had been sleeping at the time the fire broke out so suddenly. He therefore led his brothers in that quarter, and believed he was able to tell exactly which windows belonged to the room in question.

These were not so high up but that an agile fellow like Bob could drop to the ground, should it be necessary; and in fact, the chances were that an exit that way might be much safer than to try and go back down the stairs.

It was very hot, standing there, and the boys felt

as though the skin would peel from their faces, so they tried to shelter themselves by means of coats, or the bed covers they had brought along.

Frank had selected the strongest blanket, and meant to make use of it, should Bob appear in sight, bearing the baby, which could be dropped down, and thus saved. The one great question with him now was whether the boy, battling with the smoke that must hurt his eyes, could find his way at all to the specified room.

The fact that Bob had been all through the old house many times when playing in the vicinity with some of his mates, seemed to be in his favor. He ought to know about the arrangement of the interior, though it was always possible to become bewildered while trying to grope his way along.

Frank hoped that would not occur. It was the one thing he feared, because Bob was so impetuous, so daring, that he sometimes acted from very impulse, and without reasoning things out.

A minute,—two of them—must have passed, and to those boys waiting there it seemed ten times as long. They could hear the fire crackling fiercely, and even knew when some of the burned rafters over the kitchen, where the blaze seemed to have started, fell with a crash into the ruins beneath.

Eagerly they watched above, their eyes ranging from window to window, and with the heat almost burning their skin despite the shields they had

raised. Smoke continued to pour out wherever it found a vent; great clouds of it, that, now and then, held a tongue of flame in addition.

Meanwhile Bob—brave Bob—was groping his way into the house, every nook and cranny of which seemed filled with smoke, or with the hotter flames.

For a moment, after passing the charred threshold, Bob's heart failed him. He could see nothing for a few seconds, and, mingled with the crackle of flames, and the crash of falling timbers, he could hear the dull murmur of the crowd outside. And then, above everything else, came the wail of the frantic mother:

"My baby! Oh, my baby! Save my baby!"

If Bob, only for an instant, had been tempted to turn back, his rash intention gone, this cry would have stiffened his waning courage. But it was not needed. Bob never left a thing, once he had started it, unless it were utterly impossible.

"I'm going to get that baby!" he muttered.
"I'm going to do it!"

Even in the desperate state of mind that was necessary to urge him onward, Bob did not lose his usual caution. He realized that, by keeping low down, he would find better air, since the flames and smoke always go upward; cold air lying near the floor, as it is heavier than heated air.

"Let me see—what did she say?" murmured Bob, forcing his reeling brain to activity. He

felt his senses leaving him, because of the smoke that choked him, but he fought back the sensation. "The room to the left—at the end of the hall—up the stairs beyond the door—that's how I'm to go—that's how I've got to go!" Bob fiercely told himself.

He staggered on. For a moment, from one room, there swept across the hall a tongue of flame.

Bob drew back, and crouched lower down. The flame passed over him, and he held his breath for he knew it might be death to inhale that. But it was but a momentary puff, caused by some back-draught, and he was able to reach the stairs.

Then he struggled upward. The boards were hot to his feet, and he felt some of them giving way, as the flames had eaten half through them on the underside.

"Got to hustle!" Bob told himself, grimly.

On he went, bounding up the stairs. The smoke was thicker now, and as he reached the upper hall he had to crawl on his hands and knees in order to breathe. At one place he saw where some charred beams had fallen from the roof.

He gave a leap over them, coming down sprawling on the other side, and half choked by the smoke he had breathed. On he went, trying to keep his reeling senses from going.

He staggered into the room where he had been told the child was. He groped about in the black-

ness, slipping and stumbling until he found the bed. Then he felt along in it until his fingers encountered a bundle.

"The baby!" he gasped. Claspings it close to him, and seeing that it was fully covered by a blanket, Bob groped his way out into the hall again. He stooped once, to get a mouthful of comparatively cool air near the floor, and then made a dash through the flame-tinted smoke to where dimly he saw a casement.

"There he is!" suddenly shouted Dave, whose sharp eyes were the first to discover that a figure had appeared in one of the windows above.

"Has he got my baby?" shrieked the mother, who was hovering not a great way off, and must have overheard what Dave said.

"He's got some sort of a bundle in his arms!" Frank called out at the top of his voice, for the crackling of the fire made talking difficult.

There was a cheer from the crowd. Although they might not see their way clear to rushing into blazing buildings themselves, at the risk of their lives, men and boys could appreciate the daring of one who did not hesitate an instant when he believed the call to duty had come.

Frank pushed forward even closer to the wall of the house, so as to get nearly under the window where Bob crouched. No matter if the heat did seem to fairly blister, they must do their part

toward assisting their brother save that baby. And Sam, who held the other end of the blanket, was not the one to hesitate either; he could certainly go where Frank dared venture.

"Now, drop it down, and be careful how you aim!" called Frank, as he opened his arms as wide as he could, and maintained a strong grip on two of the corners of the blanket, while Sam did likewise.

Almost immediately the bundle was dropped. Truth to tell, it was getting mighty uncomfortable up there where Bob was on his knees at the window. He could barely see, such was the sting of the smoke; but he had sense enough to know that when Frank said "drop it," he must be in a position to catch the descending bundle, the baby being wrapped snugly in the bedclothes.

Hardly had it lodged there in the stretched blanket than the frantic mother came dashing down upon them, snatched the bundle up in her arms, and then again hurried away, pressing it wildly to her bosom.

But Frank for the time being forgot all about the baby. Bob was still up there, and even while he looked he saw a tongue of fire shoot out of the very next window to the one the boy occupied, proving that he must be in a dangerous position.

"Jump out, Bob; we'll break your fall! Get hold here, Fred, Dave, each grip one corner tight



“Now, drop it down, and be careful how you aim.”

now! Come along Bob; it's the best you can do! Trust us to hold you!"

And so Bob did drop down, first lowering himself part way out of the window. He fell squarely in the blanket, and while the weight of his body caused Fred to let go his hold, so that the descending boy rolled to the ground, his fall was well broken, and they saw him scramble to his feet immediately.

A roar of cheers went up from the anxious crowd. As Bob ran nimbly away from the burning house, anxious to get cold water on his face, and in his eyes, men and boys endeavored to crowd around him, every one wishing to shake his hand.

"Keep back, and let him alone!" cried Frank, as with his brothers he formed a cordon around Bob, who was sucking in water, and laving his burning face in it, with the greatest delight.

"How about the baby—was it all right?" he asked, eagerly, as he paused for a minute, with his head dripping, and his face rosy red.

"Reckon it must be," said a man nearby; "because the women are passing it around from one to another, and kissing it nigh to death right now. You done a big thing that time, Bob Spencer!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the crowd, enthusiastically.

Some one tugged at Bob's jacket, and looking down he saw that it was the oldest Bodkins girl. Her name was Susie, and Bob thought she was as

pretty as any one he could remember just then; though she was still overwhelmed with shame at the thought of having carried out the crib in her excitement, without once looking to see whether the little baby sister was in it under the disturbed covers.

"Mother wants you to come over there," she said, simply, still hanging on to Bob's jacket, as though determined that he must not refuse.

Now that was the way with Bob. He was a most modest boy, and would much rather they let him alone and forget all about it. He had done his little act just because he liked to take chances, and couldn't bear the thought of a baby being left to those flames. Besides, he meant to be a life-saver for Uncle Sam, and this seemed to be just in his line of work.

"No you don't, old fellow!" said Frank, knowing from the way Bob looked quickly around that he was contemplating a retreat, so as to avoid all this nuisance of being made so much of; "they want to thank you, and you ought not to disappoint the mother. Besides, don't you want to see the baby you saved? And this girl here doesn't mean to let you run away—not much."

So Bob had to allow himself to be escorted over to where the whole Bodkins family, together with all the women on hand, and some men as well, were gathered. Here the really embarrassed boy

was allowed to kiss the little bundle of humanity that was cooing and crowing in its mother's arms as though fires never gave it the least concern; and why should they when there were brave boys around, ready to dare any sort of danger when called upon to rescue one in peril?

And when the crippled Mr. Bodkins squeezed his hand, and with tears in his eyes told him that in all his life as a fire fighter in the city he had never seen a more dashing exploit at life-saving than Bob's recent one, then the boy felt fully repaid; for he knew that this man had been "through the mill," and could speak from experience.

And the next morning, when his own mother put her arms around his neck, and looking into his face with swimming eyes, simply kissed him tenderly, Bob did not need to be told what was in her mind. His father, too, was only too pleased to say how proud he was to know that it had been one of *his* boys who had been so ready to venture into the burning house in order to save a life.

That day all Clayton talked of little else save what a fine thing it was in young Bob to get that baby out of the fire unharmed; and doubtless just then much that he had done in the past to plague the good citizens, through his boyish love of fun, was forgotten—swallowed up in the pride they took in telling that that was the stripe of boys they raised in "good old Clayton."

Through Frank the stricken family had been looked after that night of the fire; and his mother, taking the case in hand, saw that enough people were interested in behalf of the Bodkinses to insure them a comfortable home, and replenish the household goods that had been lost in the flames.

The days passed, and Bob was anxious to learn if his father had received a letter from Uncle David, who must be in Washington by this time, with plenty of chances to see the people at the headquarters of the life-saving service; he only hoped that when the letter did come, it would bring him the wished-for news.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BARN DANCE

ON the second day after the burning of the old house, word came to the Spencer boys that there was going to be a country dance some little distance from town. A new barn had been erected by a well-to-do farmer by the name of Slimmons; and as he chanced to have a couple of pretty daughters, they had of course seized upon the chance to invite a dozen or more couples of the boys and girls from town, and start things right by having some innocent fun.

The farmer, being "under petticoat rule," as he often humorously admitted, told them to go ahead, only he meant to be on hand and make sure that nothing happened to endanger his new barn, which had not yet been insured. For when there has been one fire in a community people think about such things for awhile.

The Spencer boys were among those who were invited, because they happened to be on very good terms with the Slimmons girls.

Fred did not care to go, as he seldom bothered about such amusements. To him there was more pleasure in poring over some musty old book on how to create new forms of plant life, as the wonderful wizard out in California was doing right along, than to circle around a barn floor to the tune of a fiddle, even with the prettiest girl in Clayton.

Then Frank had hurt his ankle so that he felt obliged to forego the delight of taking his best girl; but he made Dave promise to see her there, and safely home again, because there was another fellow who would have been only too glad of the chance to do the honors, as Frank well knew.

Bob thought at first he did not care to go, for his face was still much redder than usual, because of the heat he had endured at that fire; and then again he hated to have people speak of him just as though he had really done something wonderful.

"Better change your mind about going," Frank had told him when he said he guessed he'd stay home. "Who knows but what it may be your last chance to attend a country dance, if you should get your appointment soon. And then again, I'm told that that Bodkins girl Susie is going to be there, if she can find anybody to fetch her. You know they're living in Mr. Gregory's farmhouse back of his place now. Better see her there, Bob; you saved the baby, now help out the sister!"

Now, of course Frank meant this much in the

way of a joke; but no matter, Bob did change his mind; and when he appeared at the Slimmons's barn that evening he was sure enough escorting the new girl in Clayton, Susie Bodkins, who looked as pretty as a peach, Bob thought, proud of the fact of bringing her there, and introducing her to all the rest of the young people.

The interior of the barn had been tastefully decorated in country fashion. Bundles of corn stood in the corners, flowers and fruits were strung around plentifully; and while it may not have looked as well as might have been the case later in the Fall season, when ripe pumpkins and all such were ready for the picking, it appeared a Paradise to those care-free lads and lassies, as they set about enjoying themselves to their hearts' content.

Two local fiddlers had been engaged, and seated on a raised dais they worked until they seemed ready to melt away with the heat. All the old familiar tunes were played, and a few that were not quite so ancient either; but the dances were of that type still so much in vogue among people who do not live in the big cities, and yet who get all there is to enjoy out of life.

Bob soon got over his nervous feeling, when he found that the young people were not going to perpetually bother him about that event of the other night. Of course in the eyes of the girls Bob was more or less of a hero, and he never had

the least trouble about getting a partner for every dance he chose to join in.

Now there were several boys who had not received invitations to the barn dance, and felt more or less disappointed on this account. They had come out all the same, and hovered around the building during the evening, ready no doubt to play some practical joke if the opportunity presented itself, like putting out the lights, filling the floor of the barn with something that would put a stop to the dancing, or possibly letting a few rats loose that had been brought along for the purpose.

But Farmer Slimmons knew boys, as he had raised some of his own; and he had his several stout hired men on duty throughout the evening, patrolling the outside. They knew that these boys were looking in through the openings, but so long as they made no hostile demonstration the men were under orders not to chase them away.

The warning had gone forth, however, that at the first sign of trouble they were to be dealt with severely; and so Dan J. Webster, who was the ring-leader of the "gang," concluded that this was hardly the time or place to get even with several of those whom they could see enjoying themselves within.

Toward Bob Spencer in particular this same Dan Webster seemed to feel hostile, for he never could bear to see any other fellow successful. As he said to some of his cronies, "just because Bob

had chosen to walk into that old house that was smoking, and hand out a little baby to his brothers, why should people act so silly, and call it 'one of the most heroic acts they had ever heard of?'"

Among themselves these three boys made all manner of fun of Bob's dancing. Perhaps Bob may not have been quite so graceful as several of the other fellows, for he had been built stockily, and was at his best when climbing a tree no other boy could ascend, clinging to the gutter of a house in playing "conquer," or mastering stunts that his mates refused to attempt.

Whenever Bob chanced to come near one of the openings they managed to let him know they were around, and their half whispers reached his ears, though he was in too good a humor to let anything like these little slurs disturb him; and so Bob determined not to notice anything they said, providing they did not go too far.

This was all very well, but it happened that young Webster did not mean to let it stop there. He had heard reports to the effect that possibly Bob meant to go away somewhere soon; and there was a long-standing grudge between them that ought to be settled, once and for all, he thought. And likely enough a chance could be found on this very night to even the score, now that he had his two cronies along to lend a helping hand.

When Bob started out to act as escort for pretty

Susie Bodkins to the barn dance certainly such a thing as becoming engaged in a fight was far from his mind.

And when those three fellows jumped out of the bushes, blocking the way, as he found himself in a lonely place about a quarter of a mile from town, and declared that they meant to give him the pummeling that had been so long due, Bob could hardly believe they meant it.

"Better go away, boys, and leave me alone," he said, still in a good humor, because he had had a very pleasant evening, all told, and was even now escorting a nice girl home; "some other time I'll sure accommodate you; but you see I've got company along now, and it wouldn't be the right thing to scare her by any sort of a row. I know you, Dan Webster, so you might as well take that handkerchief off your face; and you too, Con Tracy and Sol Cowdrey. Let us pass, please!"

One of them struck Bob as he was going by. Like a flash he turned on them.

"Better not try that again, any one of you, that's all!" he exclaimed; when again the boy who was behind him, like the coward that he was, raised his fist, and gave Bob another severe jolt.

"Please stand back here out of the way, Susie," the boy at bay said. "I see they mean to force it on me; and because they're three to one I reckon I ought to be allowed a little liberty to use this."

He had snatched up a stout stick, being as quick as a cat to see an advantage. When Dan Webster and his two cronies started to rush in on him, with all sorts of cries calculated to bewilder and alarm the object of their attack, they were met by a bombardment that caused them to change their minds speedily enough.

It is true that Bob received many a blow himself, but he gave generously in return; and moreover hustled around with that cudgel so vigorously that yells of actual pain followed every time he swung it; while several times he knocked one of his assailants completely over.

The astonished girl stood there, watching the unequal battle. Frightened she undoubtedly must have been; but at the same time how could she help admiring the way her consort carried himself? And doubtless the cries of pain on the part of the cowardly trio as the stick found them out, were as music in her ears.

In the end Bob managed to beat them off, so that they turned and fled. When he sent out a few shouts after them they fell into a panic; and one fellow was even heard to stumble, and splash into the pond that happened to lie conveniently near.

Bob, still carrying his cudgel triumphantly, and with several discolorations on his face to mark where the knuckles of his assailants had struck him, saw Susie home; and in answer to her solicitous

inquires concerning whether he had been hurt, gaily replied :

“ For every time they got to me I reckon I sent in half a dozen whacks that left their mark. And believe me, every one of those fellows will go around with black eyes, or something like that, for weeks. I’m awful sorry it happened while you were along, Susie, but I hope you don’t blame me, because you know I tried to keep clear of any trouble.”

And when she said that, taking it all in all, she didn’t know that she was so *very* sorry, Bob could not understand just what she meant ; and he puzzled over that remark all the way home.

It was true that he had been upset once or twice in the scuffle ; but being as agile as a cat he had been able to recover his balance, and get busy again with his stick. Bob believed that he would have to keep that same life preserver for all time, just to remember the little affair by.

Bob was an unusually early riser, and being the first one awake on the following morning he proceeded to dress. He had just finished doing this when suddenly he remembered that he had borrowed his mother’s little gold watch on the evening before. She sometimes allowed Frank to wear it ; but Bob was in high favor just then, so that his desire to put on a few little airs only amused the good mother,

and the watch had been readily handed over to him.

And when Bob came to look for it, great was his astonishment as well as chagrin to find that it was missing. Undoubtedly it had fallen from his pocket on one of those occasions when he was pushed over by the boys with whom he had been struggling; and must even then be lying on the road where the battle had taken place.

CHAPTER IX

THE MISSING WATCH

NONE of the others was up, nor would Bob have been inclined to take them into his confidence had they been awake; for somehow or other he usually kept his own counsel, and was not of a confiding nature.

Indeed, his mother had known him to go a long time with an injury, determined to stick it out, and only confessing that he had hurt himself some days before when she noticed him limping.

It was of course his first and natural thought to hasten outside, mount his bicycle, and speed to the spot where the encounter of the preceding night had occurred.

Although it had been dark at the time, Bob felt positive that he would know just where to look. If he had any doubts about it, he might examine the border of that little frog-pond, and learn where one of the fellows in his haste to leave the scene of hostilities, after things had grown too warm for comfort, had slipped, lost his moorings, and plunged into the said pond.

The recollection caused Bob to smile grimly; he

could not help it, even if his heart was heavy with the possibility of a serious loss, should his mother's cherished watch not be found again.

He unconsciously allowed one hand to stray to his face, tenderly touching a couple of spots where he had been struck by the fists of his cowardly assailants; but he had been wise enough to glance at himself in the glass while brushing his heavy head of hair before coming out, and knew that at least he did not show any particular signs of the fray.

"And unless I'm mistaken in my guess that's more than any of that lot can say this fine morning," Bob muttered to himself; "for I think I got in some mighty good licks with that little stick."

Boy-like he seemed to find considerable consolation in that fact; but perhaps it is human nature to feel that one has not suffered in vain; and it pleased Bob also to remember that pretty Susie Bodkins had been a witness to his work. He remembered that she had even declared she was not so *very* sorry she had been compelled to watch him defend himself against three fellows, and that made him smile again, for he understood better what she meant now.

Hope buoyed up his spirits as he hurried forward, after jumping from his wheel. This road was not used a great deal, and the chances were that no one had come along it this same morning; so

that if the little gold watch lay there, having fallen from his pocket during his struggles, he would find it easily.

Five minutes later Bob was not feeling quite so positive about success rewarding his efforts. He had gone carefully back and forth, eagerly scrutinizing every foot of the road, and so far without discovering the object of which he was in search.

But perhaps it had been tossed into the grass alongside the road. With this new idea in his mind, which seemed very plausible too, he started to look again, and spent a full half-hour doing so, but only to have his labor for his pains.

Bob was a very stubborn boy, or at least a determined one. That watch was somewhere, and just *had* to be found. He would look for an hour, two of them, and then going home to get a bite of breakfast, come back again to renew the hunt.

Long and faithfully did he search, even combing the half-dead grass with his fingers in places; but without being rewarded, though he was constantly in a fever of expectancy, and believed that he must run upon the obstinate little object of his anxiety in the course of another minute, for it surely must be somewhere.

Once he stopped to consider the chances of his assailants having carried the watch away when they ran. Bob, however, quickly made up his mind that there was not the slightest possibility of such

a thing having happened. No, it had fallen from his pocket, somehow, and sooner or later he must come upon it.

He went slowly home finally to get some breakfast—not that he cared to eat, but was afraid one of his brothers might notice his absence, and ask unpleasant questions.

But they had gone out to look up various companions before he arrived home, all save studious Fred, who was curled up in an easy-chair, devouring some volume on the great work the Government was doing in the West, along the lines of irrigation.

Fred called out something to Bob, who simply grunted in reply, as he hurried into the dining room, only hoping that he might avoid meeting his mother just then, for he did not believe he could talk to her without confessing all, and he was not ready just yet to do that.

After swallowing a few bites, without any enjoyment whatever, Bob hurried out to his waiting wheel; and this time when he rode away he carried along with him a rake, much to the astonishment of Steven, the gardener, who scratched his head in sore bewilderment, and wondered what that boy was up to now, for Bob was always surprising people some way or other.

Armed with this implement, Bob fancied that he must surely discover the missing watch, which could hardly elude his new combing of the grass.

He worked steadily all morning, even laying out the ground so as to positively cover every foot of space; yes, and riding back on his wheel as far as the barn where the dance had taken place, under the impression that perhaps he had dropped the watch before the fight came about.

It was all useless, and despite his systematic efforts he failed to find anything to reward him for his labor.

As Bob stood there, shaking his head and trying to conjure up some new method of accomplishing his purpose, he told himself that this was the most mysterious thing that had ever happened to him.

Really it would put the shrewd Dave to his very best efforts to figure out how that watch could have vanished so strangely. Should he take Dave into his confidence, and in this way obtain the benefit of his advice? Bob disliked to do so, not that he feared Dave would betray his confidence, for he knew his brother was as faithful to a trust as the needle is to the pole; but Bob hated to confess that anything had gotten the better of him.

So he determined to keep the loss of his mother's watch to himself for a little while longer, perhaps the balance of that day; and if nothing cropped up by the next morning he would get Dave aside, and enlist his support.

Meanwhile he meant to cudgel his brain in an effort to conjure up some new way of conducting

the search; for Bob was still of a mind that the watch must be within a radius of fifty yards of the spot where the encounter had taken place with Dan Webster and his cronies.

Perhaps now, it had been thrown so violently from his pocket that it had landed a little further away from the road than he had thus far thought fit to look for signs of it.

This idea flashed into his head while on the way home to lunch, having spent the entire morning in the vain hunt. He had secreted the garden rake in the bushes, as he expected to have a further use for the same before admitting himself "down and out."

"That would explain the mystery," he told himself, brightening up a bit, for he had been feeling downcast over the results of his work; "and chances are I'll run across it this very afternoon."

But all the same he did not, and for a very good reason, because after all Bob failed to continue his energetic search; and that missing garden rake caused poor Steven considerable trouble, so that he finally had to ask Mr. Spencer to supply him with another tool; for the one Bob took away lay hidden there back of the bushes for days and weeks and months, utterly forgotten.

As to the reason for all this, it can be easily explained.

When Bob reached home, pretty downcast to be sure, yet determined not to betray his anxiety to

the sharp eyes of his brothers any more than he could help, he discovered that there was great excitement around the house.

Sam and Dave came bounding out to meet him, while he could see the grinning faces of Frank and Fred in the open doorway, as though they wished to see how Bob took the great news.

"How's your muscle, Bob; think you can pull an oar as well as you ever did?" demanded Sam, gleefully.

"Yes," added Dave, who was evidently just brimming over with the desire to further mystify the rider of the wheel, "and it's to be hoped you like salt pork better than you used to, because chances are you'll be fed on the same year in and year out after this."

"What in the wide world do you fellows mean?" demanded Bob; and then, as a thought flashed through his mind he added excitedly: "You don't say father's heard from Uncle David at last? Tell me quick, or I'll do something desperate," and he jumped from his wheel, for he had been riding slowly up to the house when the others met him.

"That's just what it means!" cried Sam, exultantly. "You're in the greatest of luck, Bob, old fellow. The letter came this morning, and nobody could find you, high or low."

"And say, did he get the appointment for me?" asked the excited boy, everything else utterly for-

gotten in that moment, when his whole future began to take on a rosy look, as he fancied that his dearest wish was about to be gratified.

"It's all settled," replied Frank, as the others joined the two in the doorway. "You must go to Washington to-morrow, and take some sort of examination before some of the officers of the board. Uncle David says you'll not have the least trouble in passing with flying colors. And father hasn't gone down to business this whole morning, for wanting to talk with you about a lot of things."

"Come in to lunch first, Bob," Fred put in just then as he squeezed Bob's hand warmly; "for the bell just rang; and then you've got to put in some great licks this afternoon getting your clothes in readiness. There's a heap to do, mother says, between now and the going of the nine-thirty train to-morrow morning."

Such an afternoon and evening as followed! Was it any wonder that Bob could not think of anything else save those matters that had to do with his going out into the world, to take up service with Uncle Sam's brave coast defenders? He was thrilled with the thought that soon he was to be reckoned one of those sleepless guards whose duty it is to patrol the most dangerous places of the shore line from the tip of Maine to the end of the Florida peninsula; rescuing shipwrecked mariners, preventing the operations of those who would smuggle

goods duty free into the country, and in various other ways proving themselves staunch and true servants of the Government at Washington.

Some of Bob's boy friends came around that night to see the last of him, for the news had traveled far and wide; and they spent quite a merry evening together; so again the boy was kept from thinking of anything not connected with his journey of the morrow.

His mother meanwhile saw to it that his bag was packed, and doubtless more than one tear dropped in with the garments she was so carefully placing there; for this was the first of her boys to leave the home nest. But like a wise woman she realized that before long all of those sturdy and progressive lads would be following Bob's example. And besides, she and her husband had decided that it would prove the very best of training for wild Bob to be subject to strict regulations.

Probably the boy slept very little that night. More than a few times he sat up in bed and looked around at the well-remembered scene, with his beloved brothers nearby. How often would that picture come back to him, when far away from this happy home!

In the morning they were all early astir. There was a grand send-off at the station, and one would think some young hero was being honored, instead of a boy who in times past had been looked on as

something of a mischief-maker in Clayton; but then that gallant act of Bob's, when he rushed into the burning house and saved the little Bodkins baby, had in reality washed out all of his past misdeeds; so that people felt only warmly toward the lad and wished him well.

It was over at last, and the train bore him away from the dear old home town, heading toward the rising sun; for there on the coast his future lay beckoning him with rosy fingers; because Bob was a boy, and to the youthful mind what is to come always appears in golden tints.

And it was not until he had been riding for almost an hour, seated comfortably there, and looking out with interest on the landscape, that Bob had a sudden cruel twinge. He had remembered about the missing watch, and it gave him a stab, because now his mother would wonder what had become of her valued timepiece.

And so Bob had the bitter mixed with the sweet as he journeyed on toward the scene of his future activities; for the loss of that keepsake would cause his mother great grief, he felt sure. All the boy could do was to sternly resolve to devote the very first money he earned to purchasing another watch; though he knew the finest in the land would never be as precious as the one his father had given to his mother early in their married life.

CHAPTER X

ANOTHER CALL TO DUTY

AFTER a while Bob felt better. Of course he must often think with deepest regret of the loss of his mother's treasured keepsake; but since nothing could be done about it, Bob told himself crying would never mend a broken dish.

He would write to Dave secretly, telling him all about it, and asking him to continue the search along the roadside.

So as he sat there and pondered, Bob decided that he could only make amends by carrying out the plan he had in mind. His fond mother would excuse him, as she had done so very many times in days gone by. And then there was always a fair chance that Dave, who always had such luck in finding things that were lost, would discover the missing watch.

"And this is the last time, I surely hope," Bob said to himself, with a sigh, "when I shall give mother's dear heart a pang. It really wasn't my fault; and I don't see how anybody with sense could blame me. Those fellows were bent on giving

me a licking, and even father always told us it was right and proper for a boy to defend himself when set upon. I guess I did that fairly well," and, as before, the recollection of how he had used that stick on the bodies of his assailants caused Bob to chuckle.

As he had not up to now done much traveling, Bob was interested in all he saw by the way. Dave had warned him not to be friendly with strangers, and to keep pretty much to himself; also not to reveal the fact that he carried a sum of money in his pocket.

Dave knew more about these things than any of the other boys, for he was interested in the work that Uncle David did for the Government in the Secret Service, and was forever studying up how smugglers were detected, illicit distilleries in the mountains of Tennessee, North Carolina and Kentucky were found and destroyed by the revenue men, and how counterfeiters were run to earth, because some day he meant to work for Uncle Sam himself in that department at Washington.

Now, the chances were, had it been Dave who was traveling on that same train, instead of looking out of the window and allowing himself to indulge in day dreams, he would have spent much of his time studying his fellow passengers, and speculating as to who and what they were.

That was the difference between the two brothers—Bob was frank and open, while Dave could be se-

cretive, though just as truthful as any of the others. The uncle after whom he was named encouraged the boy to study human nature, because he could see what it would amount to in the end, and that some day there would be another David Spencer in the Secret Service of Uncle Sam.

How dear each one of those four brothers seemed to Bob, now that he was fairly launched in the wide, wide world! All that morning he just sat there and allowed his thoughts to rove back to scenes connected with their association; and more than ever did he feel glad to remember how the Spencer boys had always stood up for one another in their various troubles, such as come to all impulsive lads.

At noon he ate the lunch his mother had put up for him; and having more than he needed he gladly shared with a poor woman who seemed to be traveling with three children, and had not been wise or prudent enough to provide sufficient food to satisfy their demands.

Bob knew from consulting his time-table, which he did very frequently, that he was due to arrive in the city where he must change trains about four that afternoon; and that he would not get to Washington until long after dark. But his uncle had promised to be waiting there for him, and he did not worry any about that.

There was a dapper fellow aboard the car Bob

traveled in who seemed inclined to make himself agreeable. Bob did not altogether like his appearance, or the way in which he made fun of other people's peculiarities, when he dropped into the vacant seat beside him, as he did several times.

He tried his best to draw Bob out, possibly wishing to discover whether he had any great amount of money with him; and by his persistent questions finally learned that the stoutly-built boy was on his way to the coast, to become a member of a life-saving crew at a station. This seemed to interest him, and he went on to ask still more questions concerning the duties of the surfmen, and all such things, and as Bob was so full of the subject he did not hesitate to give all the information that lay in his power.

Finally, wishing to be rid of the fellow, Bob casually mentioned the fact that he expected his uncle to meet him at the station in Washington; and also remarked that the said gentleman was one of the most noted among the Secret Service officers. Two minutes afterwards the seat alongside Bob was vacant again; noting which the boy chuckled softly to himself.

"I just thought that would put a clincher in his wanting to be so friendly," he told himself. "I reckon now he made up his mind that it would be dangerous business bothering with a boy who had an uncle in Uncle Sam's Secret Service. Or per-

haps he just concluded that I wasn't worth the picking, as I couldn't have so very much in my pocket after all. But he'll leave me alone from now on, I'm thinking." And Bob was right about that, for the dandified looking young fellow wandered into another car.

The afternoon passed slowly.

Of course Bob again and again tried to picture what was awaiting him when once he reached the station to which he would be appointed, after he had gone through with his examination before the officers of the board at Washington.

He did not have any doubts concerning his ability to pass muster, because Uncle David had given a number of hints as to what would be expected; and the young fellow knew they were some of his strongest points.

Besides, while not dreaming that his uncle could have any influence calculated to make things go more easily with him, it was possible that the candidate chancing to be a nephew of so well-known an officer in the Secret Service would unconsciously carry weight.

Bob, however, was only too willing to stand on his own record as a life-saver, and take his chances. Of course the folks at home had told all about that episode of the burning house, in the last letter sent on to Uncle David; and it would not be at all amiss for him to see that the officials of the board knew

about it before they met Bob; for it must always be an object with them to enlist the services of such energetic and daring young fellows in a work calling for just those qualities.

As the time drew near for the train to pull into the city where Bob knew he had to make a change, he got his possessions together, so as to be ready to leave the car.

There was half an hour to spare before the other train, bound for Washington, would arrive, even if it was on time; but Bob had been warned by Dave not to wander around, or leave his bags for even a minute; because there were all kinds of pilferers on the lookout for just such opportunities; and they might think it worth while to carry off some of his property, which he would regret losing.

He saw the dapper looking young chap meant to stick to the train, for as Bob stood on the platform, after having alighted, he glimpsed a hand waving to him, and recognized his acquaintance of the early afternoon.

"A good riddance to bad rubbish," was Bob's mental comment; for he had somehow taken a dislike to the other, and wished to see no more of him.

Setting his baggage in a corner, where he could make inquiries about the train he was to take for have his eyes on it, Bob went to the ticket office to Washington.

An elderly lady was just ahead of him, and she

had so many questions to ask, about a train she was to take, that our hero thought his own would arrive before he had a chance to inquire about it.

"Are you sure I don't have to change?" the nervous old lady wanted to know.

"Yes, ma'am, I've told you that before," answered the patient agent.

"Oh, so you did. I forgot. And will my trunk go on the same train as I do?"

"Yes, if you have checked it."

"Oh, I've done that all right. The reason I'm so anxious about my trunk is that I've got a fruit cake in it that I made myself. It's for my daughter Nancy. I'm going to see her. I haven't been to her house in two years, and she always did like my fruit cake. I wouldn't have my trunk lost, with that cake in it, not for anything."

"Oh, your trunk will be all right," the agent said, with a smile, trying to get Bob's eye to signal to him to break in with his question, and allow the old lady to pass on.

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say so," the nervous passenger went on. "I could give your wife a recipe for that cake, if she'd like to have it."

"I'm afraid I'll have to get a wife first," the agent said, blushing a bit.

"What! You don't mean to tell me a nice young chap like you isn't married yet!" exclaimed the old lady. "Well! if you ever do get married let me

know, and I'll send you that recipe. Now you're sure I won't have to change cars?"

"Quite sure, ma'am."

"Oh, yes, I asked you that before; didn't I? Well, I don't travel much, and I s'pose I'm flustered."

Finally she moved far enough away from the window so that Bob could get up to it.

"How about that Washington train?" he asked.

"Half an hour late at the junction," answered the agent, "and she's likely to lose more time. It's a heavy grade from there on. You can go to a moving picture show, if you want to, and not miss her."

"Thanks," laughed Bob. "But I guess I'll stay out in the air."

He went outside, and, for a time, strolled up and down the station platform, watching the railroad men make up a freight train. There were several other passengers waiting about, some content to sit still on the benches, while others paced nervously up and down, as though this would make the time pass more quickly.

Among the latter was an elderly man, whose dress and general appearance, as well as the the rolling manner in which he walked, made Bob feel sure that he was a sailor. Somehow this seemed to make the boy more interested in the man, and when, in their strolls up and down the platform, they passed close to one another, Bob ventured to nod slightly.

The sailor, for such Bob was sure he must be, nodded back, and then, as though encouraged by our hero's friendly advance, remarked:

"Our ships don't seem to be making port any too fast."

"No, mine's late," said Bob. "Is yours, too?"

"Yes, I'm going to Plattsburg," which town, Bob knew, was in the opposite direction from Washington. "The agent says I'll have to wait nearly an hour, and then I've got to ride two hours more. I—I wish it was over," and the old man caught his breath in a sort of gasp.

"Traveling doesn't agree with you, I'm afraid," said Bob, sympathetically.

"Not—not this kind," answered the sailor. "I don't mind a ship, where I can smell the tang of the sea, but all this soft coal smoke, and soot and cinders and sulphur—it sort of—goes against my stomach."

The old man really seemed in pain, and then a suspicion that had been growing in Bob's mind became almost a certainty. The stranger looked and acted as though he was hungry, and as Bob noticed him resume his tramp along the platform, the boy was sure that the peculiar gait was caused as much by weakness, as from the habit formed of meeting the roll and shift of a heaving deck on a stormy sea.

"I wonder if he'd be offended if I gave him money enough to buy some lunch?" mused Bob.

"I'm afraid he would. I might be making a mistake. Guess I'd better not. I'll wait a bit."

He, too, again began walking up and down, passing the sailor at times.

"Well, it isn't much longer," said Bob, with a smile, after one or two turns up and down the long platform.

"Not for you, but my train doesn't come in for some time after yours," said the old man. And again a spasm of what seemed to be pain passed over his face.

Bob's fingers went to his pocket. He had a dollar, put aside from his main sum, which he had intended spending for himself, but he was not hungry.

"I've a good notion to give it to him—I'm sure he must have met with some misfortune—maybe had his pocket picked," mused Bob. "He doesn't look like a poor man, and yet I'm sure he's hungry. Maybe he's too proud to ask for a little sum to tide him over until he gets to his friends. Yes, I think I'll make the offer, anyhow!"

He started forward with this intention. Just then the whistle of an approaching train was heard, and the station agent called out its destination. It was not the train Bob was to take, nor would it carry the old sailor to the place where he was going.

A number of persons, however, got up and collected their baggage in readiness, and Bob looked on

interestedly, making sure by a glance that his own bags were safe.

"Look out!" came in a sudden call. Bob turned in time to see a stout man, well laden with luggage, run full-tilt into the old sailor.

The latter tried to retain his balance, but the impact had been too heavy.

"Catch him! He's going to fall!" Bob heard some one cry.

An instant later, and just as the train was sweeping along the edge of the depot platform, the old sailor toppled over directly on the track of the incoming express, where he lay, an inert mass, while the whistle shrilled out its warning.

There were confused cries, women shrieked, and some men turned away. A number of the freight train crew started on a run toward the prostrate figure, but every one knew they could never reach him in time.

In a flash it came to Bob Spencer that he, alone, could save the old man's life, as he was nearest to him.

"Look out!" he cried, in shrill tones, for the burly traveler, the direct cause of the accident, was in his path. "Look out!" and with that Bob made a rush for the edge of the platform.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHIPWRECKED SAILOR

THE depot platform, at this station, was raised slightly above the tracks, of which there were two. There was a platform on either side, with no fence-barrier in between.

In a flash Bob took in the situation. He saw that the old man had fallen partly under the edge of the nearest platform, so that it would be almost impossible to raise him directly from the track, and out of the way of the on-coming train.

"I've got to pull him over to the other track—that's the only way," decided Bob, in a flash. "There's no train coming on those rails!" which fact he ascertained by a quick glance.

He gave a leap from the platform to the track, and, as he jumped in the path of the rumbling locomotive, there were more screams from the hysterical women, and hoarse cries from the men. Several of the latter started toward the boy and the motionless old man, but they were too late.

Amid the wild shrieking of the whistle, and while the locomotive fireman was rushing out from his

cab, along the runboard, with a desperate idea of getting to the pilot in time to push the sailor out of the way, Bob had grasped the old man with all his strength.

Strong as the boy was, he found need for all his muscle, for the old man was an inert mass. But, with a fierce tug, bracing his feet in the cinder road-bed, Bob managed to get the sailor off the track, and over to the other rails, just as the ponderous locomotive, with its rumbling cars, swept past.

"Good work!" Bob heard the fireman pant, as he clung to the flag-staff on the pilot, to where he had made his way. "Good work!"

And then, as the boy tried to raise the old man up, several of the freight men came to help him. The passenger train, which had so nearly caused death, came to a stop with a grinding of brakes, and soon a crowd surrounded our hero and the man he had saved.

"That was fine work!"

"Plucky lad, all right!"

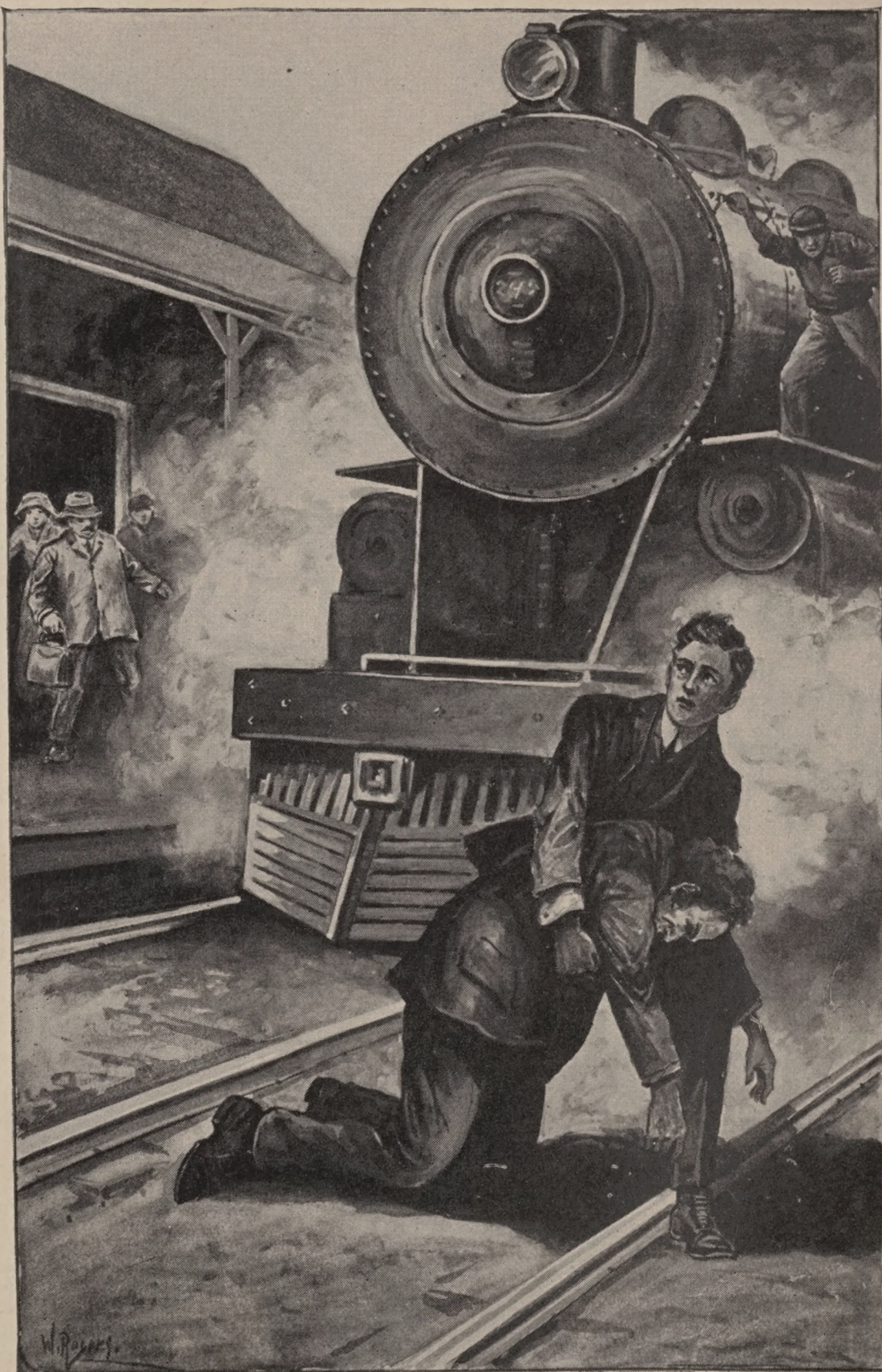
"Just in the nick of time, too!"

"Who is he?"

"Who's the old man? Is he hurt?"

These, and a score of other questions, flew back and forth as Bob and the freight crew supported the old sailor.

"Get him some water," suggested a woman in the crowd.



Bob managed to get the sailor off the track and over to the other rails, just as the ponderous locomotive, with its rumbling cars, swept past.

"That's right—he needs something," said Bob, for he could feel that the old man's heart was beating but feebly.

Some one brought a glass, and the old man, who appeared to have recovered from his momentary faint, opened his eyes. Bob managed to get him to swallow some of the refreshing liquid.

"How do you feel now?" asked Bob, as he continued to support the man with his arm under his shoulder.

"Pretty—pretty weak," was the faint answer.

"But you're not hurt?"

"No; only sort of jarred-up. I'll get over that. What happened—did the engine hit me?"

"No, some one ran into you, and knocked you off the edge of the platform," answered Bob, while the passenger train crew, seeing that nothing had really happened, hurried back to their posts. The passengers who were to take this train also scrambled for their places, so that Bob and the old man were alone barring some of the freight crew.

"Knocked off the platform; eh?" said the sailor musingly, and his voice was stronger now. "Well, I've been through lots of dangers at sea, and I sure would hate to come to my end through a land accident. But, I'm much obliged to you, son. You sure did save my life."

"That's what he did!" exclaimed one of the freight brakeman. "I never see a pluckier act. He

just jumped right down in front of that camelback engine, and yanked you off like a yard locomotive kicking a string of empties for a flying switch. It sure was all right."

"Oh, it wasn't anything," protested Bob, blushing. "I just happened to think of it; that's all."

"Well, it was a mighty good 'think' for me," said the old sailor. "But I guess I'd like to get somewhere, and sit down. I—I feel a bit weak," he added, with a gasp.

"Are you sure you're not hurt?" asked Bob, anxiously, as he assisted him across the tracks to the depot, the train having now pulled out.

"No, I'm not hurt, son. I—I just want a rest and—and—" but he did not finish, for he was gasping weakly.

Bob took a sudden resolve. He led the old man to a seat and the crowd melted away.

"Look here, sir," exclaimed Bob, quickly, "aren't you weak from hunger? You look it, and act it, and I'm thinking that was what made you topple over, as much as it was that big man colliding with you. Aren't you hungry, sir? Wouldn't you like some hot coffee and a sandwich? Now I've got plenty of money with me—that is, plenty to what I usually have, and if you'd like a small loan——"

The sailor made a gesture of dissent.

"Now don't be fussy," urged Bob. "I may be in the same boat myself, some day. Let me get you

something to eat; won't you? I'd just *like* to help you."

For a moment the old man did not answer. He seemed struggling with some emotion. Finally he asked:

"What's your name, boy?"

Bob gave him a card, that also had his uncle's name and address on it.

"I'm on my way to join the life-saving service," the boy explained. "My uncle got me the place. I'm going to be a coast-guard!"

"Good!" exclaimed the sailor. "There's no finer work, and I know what I'm talking about. You've started in well already. You saved my life, and I'll not forget it. Look here, son, I may as well own up to the truth, though it does shame me, even if it shouldn't. I *am* hungry. I haven't had any breakfast, and I haven't a cent to get any dinner. That was what made me weak, and what toppled me over."

"I thought so!" cried Bob, quickly. "And if you'll let me help you, I'll take it as a favor."

"Well, son, I will, and I never can thank you enough. First you save me from death under the wheels, and then you save me from starving. But I don't want you to think I'm an ordinary beggar. It's just been hard luck—hard luck ever since I was shipwrecked."

The sailor sighed deeply.

"Shipwrecked!" returned Bob, with interest. "I would like to hear about that. Was it lately?"

"Yes, I landed at Baltimore two days ago. I was picked up at sea, about three hundred miles from land. Osgood is my name—Captain John Osgood, of the *Mary Ellen*. I—I'll tell you all about it, if you care to hear."

"Of course I do!" cried Bob. "But not until you've eaten. Here, sir, you come with me. I could stand a cup of coffee myself, I think. My nerves are a little upset," and making sure that his baggage was still safe, Bob led Captain Osgood toward the depot lunch room.

"Now we'll eat!" exclaimed the boy, "and then I'll hear your story. I'm very much interested in it."

"But I don't want to keep you—you might miss your train," protested the sailor.

"Then I can get another," laughed Bob, "but I might not, ever again, hear such a story as yours. Come along, sir!"

CHAPTER XII

A STORY OF THE SEA

"HERE, waiter!" called Bob, to the man behind the counter. "Something good and hot—and in a hurry, if you please. Got any warm soup?"

"Yes, ox-tail!"

"That sounds good!" exclaimed Captain Osgood. Already some color was coming back into his pale cheeks, that had turned white, under the tan, because of his fright and weakness.

"A little soup first," ordered Bob, "and then something substantial. And don't you talk any more until you've eaten something," he ordered the sailor, with a kindly smile.

"Aye, aye, sir!" exclaimed Captain Osgood. "I'm more used to giving orders than taking them," he said; "but this time I'll be mate and you can be captain, Bob Spencer."

Bob said afterward that he never enjoyed a meal so much. It was not that he was so hungry, but that he enjoyed seeing the half-famished sailor eat. And then, when the first edge of Captain Osgood's appe-

tite was dulled, Bob consented to listen to the sea-story.

"It was not far from Porto Rico that the hurricane struck us," began the old sailor. "The *Mary Ellen*, which I hoped would be my last sea venture, was a good ship, but we couldn't stand up against that wind and those big seas. She just went to pieces.

"We stood by as long as we could, and worked the pumps to the last, but it was no use. I managed to make myself fast to a piece of the mainmast and some other wreckage, as she went down, and then I floated off. I won't tell you all I suffered before I was picked up—maybe you can guess, for you must have been reading up on what happens to them as go down to the sea in ships."

"I have," answered Bob, with feeling.

"Well, that was what happened to us. After Captain Morgan—he was in command of the *Mary Ellen*, and I was mate—after we had done all we could, we finally had to give up. I don't know what became of the rest of them, but I was washed overboard, clinging, as I said, to some wreckage. And all I had in the world I left on the ship."

"Then you had an interest in her?" asked Bob.

"No, not exactly, though I did invest in some of the cargo. But all the savings of a life-time—five thousand dollars—went down with the *Mary Ellen*."

"Five thousand dollars!" cried Bob, in astonishment. "Then you must have been rich!"

"No, lad, far from it. But when I found I was getting too old to be as active as I once was, and when I shipped, as I did, as mate on the *Mary Ellen*, instead of looking for a berth as captain, as I could have done if I had chosen, I took with me all the money I had in the world. Five thousand dollars it was, in cash, and I hoped to make it more by some trades in Porto Rico.

"But it wasn't to be. We ran into that storm, as I said, and we went to pieces. There was no time to go down in my stateroom, and get the money."

"I should have thought you could do that—and put it in a money belt, Captain," spoke Bob, wonderingly.

"Well, I might have had, if it hadn't been for the fact that I was so careful as to hide my cash in a secret place in my stateroom," returned the old sailor, as he ate with less appetite, now that his first hunger was appeased.

"You see I was afraid of thieves, and when I found there was a secret place in the bulkhead of my stateroom, I stowed my money away there. It took some little time to open it up, and, though I did go below when I found we were going down, I had no time to get out the cash. It went to the bottom of the sea with the ship."

"That's too bad," said Bob, sympathetically.

"Yes, for I counted on that as my last voyage," resumed Captain Osgood. "I figured on making enough so I could retire and live with my widowed daughter Mary, and little Lucy, my grandchild. We were going to be very happy together.

"But I lost everything. As I told you, I was finally picked up at sea, on the wreckage, with only the clothes I wore. But the crew and passengers of the rescuing steamer were kind to me. They made up a little purse for me, and fitted me out and started me on my way to Plattsburg.

"But I had more bad luck. I bought my ticket, and stowed away what money I had left for rations on the way. Then my pocket was picked last night, and, since then, I've been without a cent. So I couldn't eat, having no money. I didn't want to beg—I never had—and I thought I'd make out until I got to my daughter's house. But really I was terrible hungry."

"That was what made you weak," said Bob.

"I believe it was, son. But it's all right now. I feel fine!"

"Then I'm going to make you feel a little better!" exclaimed Bob, with a smile. "I know what it is to travel without money in your pocket, and I have more than I really need. Now I'm going to ask you to let me make you a loan."

"Oh, I couldn't think of it, my boy. I have my

ticket, you know, and I'll soon be at my daughter's house."

"But there is no telling what might happen before you get there," went on Bob. "Now I have twenty dollars. I won't need all that, for I'll soon be with my uncle in Washington. I want you to take ten dollars of that."

"No, Bob, I couldn't think of it."

"But you must," insisted the boy, and he pressed a ten-dollar bill into the old sailor's hand. "You can pay me back when you like," our hero went on, generously.

For a moment the old man did not answer. Tears came into his eyes, and finally he said:

"Boy, you make me feel that, after all, this world is filled with good people. I was beginning to doubt it, after I lost all my savings, though that was no one's fault. Surely this world is a good place after all. I—I can't thank you enough."

"Then don't try," urged Bob. "But I must be going. I think it is nearly time for my train. I hope, some day, to see you again. I wish I had been a coast-guard, near where the *Mary Ellen* was wrecked. Maybe I could have helped save her—and your money."

"Well, that's very good of you to say, my boy, but I'm afraid there was no chance. That was an awful storm. My money is at the bottom of the sea, now."

"But," spoke Bob, more for the sake of saying something comforting, than because he really believed it, "perhaps some part of her may have floated, and there might be a chance that you would get your savings back."

"The good Lord grant it, boy, but it's too much to hope. But, since you are so good, I will accept this ten dollars. But only as a loan. I'll pay it back as soon as I can, and I guess you'll find that the Osgoods always keep their word."

"You've been more than good to me. I'll never forget you. Here's my address—write to me once in a while."

Bob promised, and then, as he heard his train being called, he shook hands with the old sailor, whose life he had saved, and whom he had so befriended, and hastened to his car.

"Don't forget to write!" called Captain Osgood, as he walked out of the restaurant. How much more firm was his step than when he had been half-famished!

"I won't!" answered Bob, and then he sprang up the car steps, waving a farewell to the old man with whose fortunes he was destined to be more closely linked in the future than he even dreamed of.

Then, being whirled on his way to Washington, to meet his uncle, Bob gave himself up to many

thoughts—but though chief among them were those having to do with his new life, as a coast-guard, he could not help thinking of Captain Osgood, and his little fortune, so strangely swallowed up by the angry sea.

CHAPTER XIII

APPOINTED TO DUTY

"It's all settled, Bob!" exclaimed Uncle Dave, two days later, as he bustled into a room where his nephew was comfortably installed in a chair, looking over the maritime department of a great New York daily that always gives considerable space to news of sea-going vessels, and the various happenings along the coast, of interest to all those who look to the ocean for their livelihood.

"Then I get the appointment, do I?" asked the pleased boy, immediately jumping to the conclusion that these joyous words could mean nothing less.

"Oh! that was a foregone conclusion, after they learned what sort of a chap you have always been!" declared the Secret Service officer, with a laugh, and a proud pat on the other's broad back; "but as luck would have it, a letter was received while I was there that just about put a clincher on things. And who do you think it was from, Bob; guess hard, now?"

"Not father, was it?" asked Bob, at the same

time wondering why that light was dancing in his uncle's eyes so much.

"No, not this time, though I imagine he took his hand at letter writing a while back, to tell of a certain little thing that happened in your town, when a house was burned, and a baby came near being left to its fate. But I see you would never hit the right nail on the head, and so I'd better tell you. This communication, which contained as remarkable a story as any I've heard in a long while, was signed by a man whose name is Osgood!"

"Oh! Captain Osgood?" exclaimed Bob, astounded, and looking a bit uneasy. "Why, I never dreamed that he'd go and *tell*, or I'd have made him promise to keep still. But that's just the way it goes, a fellow can never have a secret kept."

"Secret!" roared Uncle Dave, beaming down on his nephew; "what makes you want to hide your light under a bushel that way, my boy? Why, if I'd done anything as fine as that little job I'd be so proud of it I'd ask for a medal right away. Secret? Well, I never was more pleased to know that my name was Spencer than when that old sailor's letter was read out loud. And after that there wasn't the slightest question but what you could have a vacancy that happened to exist in the crew of any station along the entire coast. Why, they were enthusiastic about it, and said they would be only too glad to offer a like job to all my other nephews,

providing they were chips off the same old block."

He was squeezing Bob's hand all this while—and Uncle Dave had a grip that was calculated to bring tears to most people's eyes, when once he forgot himself, and allowed his feelings to have full sway.

"I'm afraid Captain Osgood said too much," the boy went on, "because it was only such a little thing I was able to do for him; and besides, I didn't mean that anybody should know about it. Mother might worry, because she always thinks I'm too reckless, you see."

"Oh! I rather think the old sailor only told the exact truth in his blunt, sea-faring way," Uncle Dave continued, warmly. "And so you've been up to your old tricks again, this time jumping down right in front of an oncoming train, and carrying a man off the track in time, just by the fraction of a second? Yes, and not satisfied with that you must divide your money with him when you heard how he had met with trouble and shipwreck! Ah! that warm heart of yours will always keep you poor, I'm afraid, Bob; but all the same you're an honor to the family; as I always said you'd be, when they used to tell me about some of your pranks."

"And so Captain Osgood took the trouble to write to the department at Washington, did he?" mused the boy, smiling a little as though half

pleased; "well, one thing I'm sure of now, and that is he was no fraud. The sinking of the *Mary Ellen* was just as he told me; and he did lose his savings of years by her going down!"

"That's what he says in his letter, and it was easy to see that the old tar had difficulty in finding words to express what he thought of *you*, lad. But you must let me tell this story in my own way the next time I write to your father; that is, unless you prefer to be the one to relate the facts, though ten to one you'd never do justice to it, in your modesty."

"Tell them, if you think best, Uncle Dave," Bob went on to say, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Perhaps some of the boys will think it was reckless of me; but what else could I do? There wasn't a second to waste, and if I'd hesitated perhaps both of us might have been caught under the wheels of that engine. But please let that subject drop, and talk more about what is going to happen to me."

"Well, I can understand your eagerness there, at least," remarked Uncle Dave, "and fortunately it is in my power to relieve your curiosity to some extent. It has been found that there is need of one more good strong surfman on the crew of the life-saving station at Wyamoke, down the coast, and you have been ordered there."

Bob sprang to his feet, all excitement.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, while his eyes danced with

delight, "why, don't you know, Uncle, that station is reckoned the most dangerous of all, barring only the one at Cape Hatteras?"

"So they informed me," the other nodded, eyeing the boy's kindling eyes with a warm admiration, as well as the affection an uncle might show toward a favorite nephew. "And it seems to please you to know that you are likely to soon be up to your neck in trouble, saving sailors from the grip of the seas that break along that wild strip of coast."

Bob looked at him in more or less astonishment.

"Well, why shouldn't I, when that is what I've come for?" he demanded. "Of course I don't want wrecks to happen, but they will, all the same; and someone has to be on hand ready to help the poor fellows. But now that it's all settled I feel relieved. I've been afraid that they might refuse me on account of my age, or something else."

"Those things might have counted against an applicant who lacked some of the splendid qualifications you happen to possess, Bob," said Uncle Dave, seriously. "I don't know that my personality counted for much, because these gentlemen are above being influenced by any such feelings. But they really believe that it must be for the uplift of the service when they can get recruits of your stamp, enthusiastic, sturdily built, quick as a cat to see and do, and just natural life-savers in the

bargain. And I quite agree with them, I must say."

"And so Captain Osgood thought it his duty to try and influence them to take me into the service, did he?" Bob observed, wishing to change the conversation.

"It was a frank, bluff letter, just as a warm-hearted old sea dog would be likely to write," continued the other; "and I'm promised it after a bit. I told them I'd like to send it home to your mother, Bob; and they all agreed that a mother could not have a nicer present than to receive such a flattering missive concerning one of her boys. Indeed, one of them asked me if he could call around at my rooms this evening, and meet you. He has several lads of his own, and is interested in what goes to make up this Spencer stock. I was only too proud to say we would be glad to welcome him to-night, Bob, because you leave Washington to-morrow."

"So soon as that?" ejaculated the boy, his face flushing with eagerness. "Well, I'll be sorry to say good-bye to you, Uncle; but duty first, you know, when you're in the employ of Uncle Sam!"

"That's the right sentiment every time, Bob!" declared the other. "And I'm under no apprehension whatever regarding your making good in the profession you've chosen to follow. All I hope and pray is that you may be spared to your mother

many years; for it is a business that often brings its followers in close touch with death. But we all have to take chances in our work. I myself have often been in desperate situations, from which it seemed that nothing could extricate me; yet so far I've managed to hold my own. The Spencers never give up the ship, do they, Bob, so long as one plank holds to another?"

"That's what I'm told, Uncle Dave," replied the boy, smiling with pleasure to think that his uncle, so well known as one of the most daring of the Secret Service officers, should stoop to lift a boy like him up beside him, and place them both in the same class.

Somehow that confidence in him felt by his uncle did more to give Bob the assurance he needed in carrying out his plans than any other influence. Yes, he must never forget that he was a Spencer; and that some of the best blood in the country, North and South, flowed through his veins.

"And I shouldn't be much surprised, Bob," continued his uncle, "if sooner or later you rubbed up against some of the sly rascals with whom we men of the Secret Service have to deal. I understand that there has been considerable smuggling going on down around that section of country; and in a pinch, you know that the coast-guards are expected to lend a hand to arrest those who are trying to land cargoes on the coast that have never

paid a cent of duty into Uncle Sam's treasury."

"Is that so?" asked Bob eagerly.

"That's right," went on his uncle. "But don't imagine that, right off the reel, you're going to go out and capture some of them single-handed. I just mentioned it by way of illustration. Though there is one chap," and he took up a bundle of papers, "one chap that I'd give a good deal to see behind the bars."

"Who's that?"

"Well, they call him Jose Lopez. I guess I've mentioned him before to you."

Bob nodded, recalling the name.

"He's particularly active now, bringing in a lot of tobacco and cigars of high value, and the Secret Service men can't seem to get him."

"Isn't he the fellow with the glass eye—the one who lost his good one in some fight?"

"That's the one, Bob. And he's got a habit of cracking his finger knuckles as if he were firing broadsides. Whenever he's excited he cracks his joints without stopping. In fact, he's got his hands quite deformed from it. But I suppose that makes his fists all the better in case of a fight. He's got a friend who is as bad—if not worse. He's called Black Carlos."

"Wouldn't I like to have a hand in getting him!" exclaimed Bob with boyish enthusiasm.

"Between you and me I hope you never run

across that worthy, lad, because he's probably the worst of his kind; and if you're going to round up any smuggler at all I'd rather you began on one of the smaller fry. Just leave Black Carlos, Jose Lopez and that crowd for others to handle. But then, what's the use of crossing a river till you come to it? Chances are you'll never be called on to fight anything worse than the stormy sea; and that's quite enough, I'll be bound."

"Oh! it will not bother me, I warrant you, Uncle Dave; because I love the water, no matter whether it's smooth or as angry as can be. I can imagine how a duck must feel, because that's the way water calls out to me. But if I am to leave Washington to-morrow, perhaps I'd better be starting out to do a few little errands, for I left some of my shopping until I was dead sure of getting the appointment, you know."

"As if there was ever any doubt about that! But get along with you, then, Bob; and come back early, for we're going to have this gentleman from headquarters dine with us at our favorite restaurant to-night. It's hard for me to believe that this time to-morrow you'll be settled down in your new quarters, a coast-guard for fact, and looking out on the wide ocean for the first time in all your life. I have a letter for you to carry to your captain, which perhaps you'd better take now before I forget it. And I reckon he'll be glad to hold out a

welcoming hand after he reads what's set down there."

"If it's hard for you to believe it, think of me," said the boy, half wistfully, with his thoughts turning homeward; though he immediately brought himself up with a round turn, and shut his teeth hard, determined not to allow himself to display the first sign of weakening; "it seems that I ought to be turning back home after this pleasant little visit with you, Uncle Dave; but it'll be a good many months, I suppose, before they see me again. Well, I'll be off now. Look for me by five at the latest. And then just one more day before the dream of my life will be fulfilled."

He went from the apartment humming a merry tune, and his uncle, looking proudly after him, nodded his head approvingly, as he told himself that Bob would do; for did he not know how desperately the boy had to bite his lip to keep his feelings under control?

CHAPTER XIV

PATROLLING THE DANGER COAST

BOB SPENCER sat upon a sand dune, and looked far out upon the heaving ocean, filled with emotions that must always very nearly overwhelm any one who sees the ambition of years in a fair way of being fulfilled.

Two days before he had reached the little village of Wyamoke on the mainland, and had been taken across the wide bay in a boat to join the life-savers on the beach at the most dangerous point on the whole Atlantic seaboard, after the "Stormy Cape" known far and wide as Hatteras, the graveyard of hundreds of vessels.

It was one of his future mates who rowed him across, and of course Bob had made friends with him at once. Indeed, it was always the easiest possible thing to become acquainted with Bob Spencer, for he was as open as a book, and would meet an extended hand more than half-way.

In this fashion, then, did he come to know bluff Asa Barnes, who was a sturdy son of the sandy

beach, having spent his whole life where he could hear the ocean in its various moods.

Once across the sound and he came upon the station, which was perched upon a little elevation, where it might be seen fairly well out at sea; because sometimes in clear weather vessels came in, taking chances of the reefs or the sand shoals, to send a message, or make some inquiry.

The keeper was provided with the International Code of Signals, and stood ready to report any vessel, give latitude and longitude, and even extend information as to the weather forecast, so that if a heavy storm were expected the ship might make for the nearest harbor in time.

Here Bob first met Captain Lon Shanley, with whom his fortunes were fated to be connected for a long time. He would never forget that warm welcome; and he knew even before he had exchanged a dozen sentences with his chief that he would enjoy being in his crew.

Captain Shanley had been a life-saver for many years. He could tell of a great many thrilling rescues which he and his brave crew had performed, and which were on record in the annual books published by the Treasury Department, since the life-saving service comes under the jurisdiction of this part of the Government.

Yes, and there were men who had lost their lives while working alongside the dauntless captain of

Wyamoke Station. He himself had never shirked duty, no matter how wild the tempest, if only the lighter surfboat could be launched in place of the heavy lifeboat.

Many times had he been overturned, and tossed about by the breakers; but though others had gone down, Captain Shanley seemed to bear a charmed life, for he always got ashore some way or other, after being given up for lost.

He was a tall man, with a scar marking one of his cheeks that at first gave him a sinister look; but when you came to know him better, you never again thought a thing about it.

When he had read the sealed letter which Bob brought him he shook hands with the young fellow again, and looked more closely at him, with a gleam of admiration in his eyes that made the boy feel uneasy. He feared that some one in Washington must have been sending on a description of some of the little exploits with which he had been connected; and that did not please him at all. He preferred to start in fresh, and stand or fall by his ability to do his share of duty, when called upon in case of necessity.

But all the same Bob knew that he was going to like the profession of a coast-guard, serving Uncle Sam in the capacity of a life-saver. The smell of the sea was like incense to his nostrils; he had longed to look upon its rolling surface for such a

very long time. And somehow he did not feel afraid to test his strength and skill against the worst that the sleepy old ocean could show.

The day after Bob's arrival there was something of a heavy sea running; and he would never forget the thrill that shot through him when suddenly the captain announced that it was a splendid chance to launch the new lifeboat.

This new style of craft, a powerboat, was as yet an untried proposition at Wyamoke Life-saving Station, although it had been in use at other places for some time, and was found to be one of the finest things ever utilized in the service. Of course oars are always taken along, so that the crew of the boat may be prepared for any emergency; since it would be a perilous thing to start out through the surf without some means of propelling their craft, should an accident happen to the machinery. Besides this, the oars were apt to come in very handy when fending off from the side of a wreck, tossed as the lifeboat always is at such times by the stormy seas.

Possibly Captain Lon was not wholly satisfied with the expertness of his crew in handling the new boat, which, being somewhat heavier than the old one, still kept for emergencies, had to be handled somewhat differently.

Then again he may have wished to give the new member of the crew his first lesson in the service,

being more than curious to see just how Bob would assume his share of the work.

"Well, are you all ready for your first lesson?" asked Captain Lon, of Bob.

"I guess so."

"Better put on your oilskins. There's quite a bit of surf and spray to-day, and we'll all get wet. Now just try to imagine you're doing this in earnest, and not for fun, and you'll make out better," the captain advised Bob.

"I'll try, sir," was the answer.

"That's what I like to hear. Now then, is everything ready?" Captain Lon asked, of one of his men.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Good. Now then, no tricks, no jokes, just because we've got a new member. I want you to show him all the kinks and ropes, boys, and tell him how to do things. Just because you fellows are up in the game now," he went on, addressing the crew, "doesn't mean that you weren't green once. So no high jinks, now!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" chorused the men, and, somehow, Bob felt more at home with them.

He was filled with eagerness to have his first real test in the leap of those white-capped breakers to seaward.

To make it all as realistic as possible one of the men came running in while they were lounging

around, with the information that there was a vessel on the Hogback Shoal, with sailors making signals of distress, as though they expected their ship to break in two before long, and this necessity was supposed to act as a spur upon the life-savers.

After adjusting their oilskin coverings the men made a rush for the house that served as a shelter for the boats. Here there was a sort of wooden tramway that might be likened to a pair of skids, along which the heavy lifeboat could be trundled until it was over the loose sand; after which it would be released from the wheels which had been used to bear it thus far, and by united effort on the part of the entire crew pushed further toward the water.

Every man had a place, and Bob had been assigned his, so that he knew just where to go. Looking out upon the curling billows as they came hurrying in to break upon the beach with a roar, Bob waited impatiently for the word from the captain which would start them outward.

"Go!" suddenly shouted the station keeper, as his experienced eye told him that the proper opening had arrived.

Immediately every man put his shoulder to the task, and the heavy lifeboat started into the water. While the entire company aided in the launching only six besides the captain constituted the crew, the others being assigned to the duty of remaining on

shore to make signals, render assistance when the time came for landing, build a bonfire, it might be, that would serve as a beacon at night-time to those upon the heaving sea, or render first aid to the nearly drowned sailors who might be cast up on the beach.

Bob had grasped his oar and worked valiantly with the rest, for it was necessary to propel the boat by muscular effort until well out upon the water. Once this had been accomplished the machinery was started, and the men were allowed to rest. In this way, under the new arrangements, they were likely to arrive at the wreck in good condition to go about the work of getting the survivors aboard the rescuing boat; whereas hitherto they often reached the scene of operations completely fagged from their strenuous labors.

That first experience in bursting through the flying surf—would Bob ever forget it? And yet instead of dazing him or causing the least alarm, the boiling, bubbling waters seemed to give the boy a sense of highest exhilaration, because it was exactly what he had been longing for.

They passed out to sea for some distance, and Bob noticed carefully just how the pilot worked the lifeboat so that it met each comber slantingly, yet was never allowed to present a broadside to the mounting waves, lest a spill occur; for perhaps some day that duty might devolve upon him, and

Bob wanted to know all there was to learn about the life-saving business.

After they had covered as much of the dangerous shoals as seemed necessary the boat was again headed for the shore. Here a new experience awaited the novice, and in which he took as great interest as in the launching.

It looked as though there might be a great deal of peril in trying to run in on one of those giant rollers, and such would have been the fact had there been anything but an experienced hand at the helm. But when they had arrived at a certain stage the captain shut off power, the boat was held steady with the six stout oars until he saw the proper second had come, when he gave the word:

“Now, pull away, lads!”

As the boat started, the toppling billow caught up with them, and they were carried along with it toward the beach, in this fashion striking upon the sand, where the others were in waiting to seize hold, so that the receding waters might not drag the craft back again; after which the crew jumped waist-deep into the sea, and with a “yo-heave-o” the heavy powerboat was urged far up the beach.

“Well done, lads!” was the comment of the captain; and as he was a man of few words this told those who had been in the drill that they had accomplished all he had expected. His eye rested for a brief time on Bob, and from the little nod as

well as smile which he gave the new hand, it was evident that Captain Lon was quite satisfied with the way Bob had handled himself.

Counting Bob and the captain, who was always ready to stand his share of the work, there were now just nine surfmen at the Wyamoke Station, a full complement. The other men had joined the captain on the first of August, and had contracted to remain until the following June, but Bob had come early in September.

It was necessary to patrol the beach for a distance of several miles on either side of the station four times every night; and to accomplish this the crew was divided into two watches, the first going on duty at sundown, and the second coming off at sunrise.

The captain was not supposed to take a regular turn at this; but all the same he had about his share of it, being ready to fill the place of any man who happened to be sick; or was over on the mainland visiting his family in a case of absolute necessity; for the life-savers are supposed to cut loose from home ties when they go on duty during the stormy period between the first of August and the end of May.

Bob thought it great sport to sally forth, accompanied by a comrade, armed with Coston lights, to be burned in case of any necessity for signaling arising. While the weather remained fine this was

an easy task, but of course Bob knew that the conditions must be greatly changed once a storm came along.

He asked a thousand questions, and became well posted on such things as were bound to enter into this new life. And the more he saw of it the greater became his satisfaction. He felt that he had made no mistake in choosing a life of this kind; and was now only waiting to discover what that same ocean might look like when the wild winds caused the billows to sweep far up on the sandy beach, and ill-fated vessels were in danger of being blown on the shoals, there to go to pieces under the pounding of the surf.

As he lay there on that afternoon, thinking perhaps of home, or it might be wondering whether fortune would ever bring him in contact again with the old sailor whom he had assisted by the way, one of his mates came and dropped down beside him.

This was a young fellow, a native of the shore, who seemed to have taken a fancy for Bob. He was unpolished, and in his way uncouth, but all the same his nerve had been tested many a time, and was never known to fail him. And Thad Wappinger delighted in asking the new surfman many questions regarding the outside world, which was as yet an unknown territory to him, since he had never in all his life been more than fifty miles away from Wyamoke village.

But now it was something beyond a desire to seek information that brought Thad out to throw himself down alongside the newcomer.

"Reckon as how yuh mout see somethin' doin' to-night, Bob," he remarked, with a chuckle, as he nodded off toward the South, where a low bank of clouds seemed to hug the distant horizon.

"I was just wondering along that same line myself, as I watched the lazy way that bank of clouds rises," the other replied, showing new interest in the matter. "Of course that's something where I need a whole lot of experience before I can guess what the weather's going to be; but I'll get there yet, see if I don't. And so you think we'll have a blow before sunrise, do you, Thad?"

"Dead sartin that way," came the steady response; "Cap, he sez as how the glass she's been tumblin' fo' nigh three hours now, an' she's that low he looks fo' a extra bad spell tuh kim along. It's about time tuh git one o' them thar pesky West Indy hurricanes along the coast; and let me tell yuh, Bob, they air hummers when they does hit us."

"I've always understood that way," replied Bob, turning a more respectful eye upon that insignificant line of dark clouds, so low down as to be almost unnoticed, except by the experienced eye of a watchful mariner, or a life-saver on the coast.

"Then agin, yuh must a-noticed that it's ben

awful close terday. Seems like they jest hain't a breath o' air astirrin' nohow. Wall, thet's a purty good sign o' a change a-comin' soon. Notice thet Cap Lon he'll take a good look over every bit o' stuff, boats, signal flares, wreck gun, beach apparatus; and every rope'll be inspected jest as keerfully as if he reckoned lives depended on its holdin', which jest as like as not they be. Everything thet a station capten cud do tuh prevent accidents, that he'll be lookin' arter."

"You think a good deal of our captain, I can see," remarked Bob, who wished to get posted on everything connected with his future existence at Wyamoke Station.

"Why, yuh see we jest has tuh," came the answer. "They ain't no sort o' man as cud hold out agin Cap Lon. He's allers ready to take any surfman's place, and never sends wun o' us whar he'd be afraid tuh go hisself. Thet's why we think they hain't never been his ekal along in District Six or Seven."

"Then all I can say is, that I was mighty lucky to be appointed to this same station," remarked Bob, earnestly. "Everything depends on the captain, they say, whether the crew work together, or pull against each other. And at Wyamoke there's never been any friction, so they told me at Washington. They think that it's the model station along this district. But see there, Thad, the wind

must have taken a new slant, because the clouds are coming up lively."

"Yes, and we'd better git back tuh the station, 'cause the Cap might want us tuh do somethin' er other. He allers believes thet it's better tuh be ready than tuh think o' things arter it's too late."

And Thad was right, for the keeper found plenty to keep them all busy during the remainder of that short Fall afternoon. With the prospect of a bad night before them, it was only the part of wisdom to examine such things as were apt to be needed before another day dawned. Just as the surfman had said, Captain Lon overhauled every bit of his tackle, so as to feel renewed confidence that everything was as it should be, and that nothing would betray them when they were staking their very lives on its staunchness.

As the day drew near its close the wind increased until it was blowing a gale.

For the first time Bob saw the sea rise in its might, and the sight would have been awe-inspiring to most boys, but it did not seem to fill him with any particular dread.

On the contrary he felt a keen desire to put his puny strength and his knowledge of boats to the test, in a battle with the elements. Nor did he experience any regret that he had enlisted in the service of Uncle Sam as a life-saver.

With the coming of the storm the men donned

their oilskin garments, and their sou'westers, so as to stand the drenching they expected would be their portion before another day dawned.

"Get ready for a hard night's work, boys," Captain Lon had told them; and looking out upon the darkening sea, with its billows leaping aloft, and the spray whipped by the wind wetting their faces, those hardy souls knew that in all probability some ill-fated vessel would in the darkness be borne upon the terrible shoals, and a call for help go out that must take them upon the heaving bosom of the deep, ready to try and save the imperiled mariners.

CHAPTER XV

THE STORM

"It's partners fo' me 'n you, Bob, this night!" said Thad Wappinger, after they had eaten a hearty supper, and were ready to take up the patrol work that would in all probability keep them busy until dawn.

"I'm glad of that, Thad," remarked the boy, who seemed to have taken quite a fancy to the brawny native. "Is our watch the first, or the second?"

"We go out right away," answered the other, who was adjusting his oilskins in a manner that told how well he knew the great need there would be for these during the continuance of the storm.

"Which is our beat, North or South?" continued Bob.

"No'th for we-uns this time," Thad told him.

"And that's the quarter where most of the wrecks occur; isn't it, Thad?"

"I reckons as how fo' outen five do happen up that away; but when we has a touch o' a reg'lar West Indy hurricane they's liable to hit in on the shoals any ole place."

Thad was naturally curious about this new comrade. He could not help but wonder how Bob would stand the test when it came right down to business. A fellow might prove himself what land lubbers would call a hero, in shallow ponds where skaters had broken through the treacherous ice; or even when a fire was raging in some small building, and yet fail to make good under other conditions.

Still, the native son of the coast had looked in vain to detect any uneasiness about Bob when he stood and watched those great waves pounding over the shoals, sending up showers of spray, and finally hurling themselves up the sandy beach.

He saw the other prepare to accompany him out into the storm, and noted that he even seemed eager to make the start. Perhaps much of this enthusiasm would soon be apt to wear off, after he had been struggling against the fury of the gale for a while. But Thad was plainly astonished to see the youth so unconcerned; why, he could hardly appear more so had he been raised close to the ocean, and come in contact with these wild scenes many times every year of his life. But Bob was really a child of the storm, and never so happy as when listening to the voices of aroused Nature all around him.

When other boys crouched low in their shelter, hiding their eyes to shut out the blinding electric glare, Bob had been wont to stand, heedless alike of the drenching rain or the play of the wind, watch-

ing the red fingers of lightning run athwart the dark sky, and apparently drinking it all in with eagerness.

Having made all their preparations, the patrol of the first watch was now ready to start out, two heading North, and another couple toward the South.

They were supposed to cover some two miles and more before turning around; and to make sure that this was done with no shirking of duty they must leave a token of their presence at a certain spot at the end of the route, which the second patrol would bring in; thus proving that both sections of the guard had covered their full territory.

The little house among the sand dunes looked very cozy that night while the storm was howling all around it. The fire felt comfortable, and the glow of the lamps gave a cheery aspect to things. But the men of the coast have little opportunity to enjoy any of their nights, since one-half are supposed to be out on duty until after midnight, while the others sleep; and then the conditions are reversed.

Captain Lon, with his accustomed care, made sure that every man was in a position to do his full duty, should an emergency arise; and it is liable to happen at almost any unexpected moment with these coast-guards.

They carried a supply of Coston flares that were to be burned in case a vessel in peril was discovered; and as signals on other accounts as well, for this is

one of the most useful articles known to the life-saving service.

Besides this, each man had a few simple remedies to be used as restoratives, should he run across any unfortunate wretch who had been cast ashore, and was almost dead from the buffetings of the waves.

Every member of the corps is taught how to revive the near-drowned, and because of this knowledge, which is a part of their education, many a life has been saved that must otherwise have been lost.

All being ready, the men opened the door, and then the howl of the gale sounded louder than ever. Captain Lon shook hands with each one as they passed out; and perhaps he gave Bob an especially strong squeeze, for he knew that the boy was bound to meet with a rough experience that night, which would go far toward telling whether he was cut out for a coast-guard, or had mistaken his vocation.

But the look Bob gave him back was cheery enough; and the good-hearted keeper of Wyamoke Station found reason to hope that his first impressions of the new member of his corps had not been amiss.

The Government does not expect these life-saving stations, scattered all along the Atlantic and Pacific seaboards, and the Great Lakes as well, to the number of two hundred and eighty, to be wholly used as harbors of refuge by those who are rescued from the

various wrecks that may occur. Under certain conditions the master of such a station is allowed to take exhausted sailormen, for a short period of time.

Down along the Florida coast, where the conditions are vastly different from any other part of country, there have been instituted Houses of Refuge. These are in charge of a keeper, who is supposed to patrol the beach at stated periods, covering a certain amount of ground, and succoring any unfortunate who may have been cast ashore.

These Houses of Refuge are supplied with boats, provisions and restoratives, but are not manned by crews. In case of emergency some of the natives will take a boat out to a wreck on the first or second bar, and this without pay.

When Bob and his companion started off they had the storm in their faces for a time, as it was coming from the north-east; one of the worst quarters for trouble on the whole coast, because it threw vessels that had lost their bearings on the shoals before they could be warned off by the distant lightship that guarded the danger zone.

"Whew! This is some blow!" cried Bob, as he turned his back to the wind for an instant, in order to take a full breath. "Does it often blow this way down here?"

"Once in a while," yelled the other in Bob's

ear, for one had to yell in order to be heard above the fury of the gale.

"Once in a while is twice too often!" answered Bob back, with grim humor. "Is your hair fastened on good and tight, Thad?"

"My hair? Why in course it is—that is, what I got left? Was you a thinkin' I wore a wig?"

"I didn't know, Thad, but if you do, tie it on well."

"Huh!" grunted the other, hardly understanding Bob's humor. "Come on!"

Again they started up the beach, bending down their heads to escape the almost tropical fury of the wind and rain. The water seemed to come down in sheets, and this, with the salty spray blowing over them, made it seem like walking through a fountain.

Every now and then would come a dazzling flash of lightning, followed by a booming crash of thunder, that seemed to shake the very ground.

Bob frequently turned his eager gaze out to sea when this glow lighted up the tumbling waters, trying to discover if there were any signs of an unfortunate vessel in sight.

That wonderful view fascinated the boy. Long had he tried to picture such a scene in his mind, and now he found that the reality was even more astounding than he had ever believed could be possible.

They pushed on for half an hour, and then Thad caught hold of his companion's arm, bringing him to a halt.

"We've jest got tuh rest up a bit, Bob!" he shouted, for ordinary talking would have been useless while all that riot was going on around them.

"Just as you say, Thad," replied the other, as though it was a matter of indifference to him.

Thad had held out even longer than usual, thinking to hear his companion ask indulgence. He was surprised to find out that Bob seemed impervious to fatigue.

In the lee of a high sand dune they sought shelter from the worst of the storm's fury, and tried to catch their breath, so as to be in condition to once more face the gale.

Under ordinary conditions they were supposed to cover the two miles and back twice each night, before turning out the second relay of men; but this would be an utter impossibility while such a storm was in full blast.

To-night they were slated to make their way to the end of the route, leave their token there for the second relay to get and bring in; and after spending perhaps an hour or more on the distant spot, keeping a bright lookout for signs of vessels standing into danger, return to the station again.

Masters of vessels are given copies of the rules and regulations connected with the United States

Life Saving Service; and in particular are cautioned, if they are driven ashore anywhere in the vicinity of a station along the sandy coasts, where there is not much danger of the ship breaking up immediately, to remain aboard until assistance comes; and under no circumstances must they attempt to land through the surf in their own boats, until the last hope of rescue from the shore has vanished.

Often when it seems comparatively smooth at sea there is a dangerous surf running, which may not be perceptible three or four hundred yards off shore; and in consequence of this many valuable lives have been sacrificed by crews of stranded vessels being deceived, and attempting to land in their own boats, not suitable for standing the fierce pounding of the surf.

When Thad believed that they had rested enough to allow of their continuing the journey in the teeth of the storm, he announced the fact to Bob; and accordingly they once more set forth.

It was a hard task to reach the end of their route, and several more stops had to be made before this was done. Here there was a sort of shelter where the patrol could ward off the worst of the wind and rain while waiting for an hour or so to elapse, before starting on the return trip.

They hoped to have it a little easier when they could in a measure turn their backs to the wind,

though it was bad enough, take it any way one would.

Every little while the anxious Bob would come from behind the shelter and gaze eagerly out upon the tumult of raging waters. What with the thunder, and the roar of the breaking billows as they pounded on the sandy beach, the noise was indeed deafening. And the very prospect of having to launch the lifeboat, to start out on that raging sea, would have caused many a hardy soul to shiver with dismay.

Bob was not hoping that a wreck would occur, even while more than eager to himself take part in the rescue of an imperiled crew; but nevertheless he seemed to watch with unusual vim; and Thad, to whom it was an old, old story, was perfectly willing to let the other take this duty on his shoulders.

Several times Bob thought he caught a fleeting glimpse of something that looked like a vessel far out at sea; and on each occasion he watched most anxiously until a succeeding flash came, to find that it had vanished, and could after all have been only the foamy crest of a giant billow.

But when they had been in the little refuge about an hour, after a little interval had elapsed, upon once more standing up and taking a sweeping view of the storm-swept sea, Bob gave vent to an exclamation of excitement; for this time he knew that

he was not mistaken. There in plain sight he discovered a bark that seemed to have been thrown upon the treacherous shoals, for it was shifting broadside to the onrushing seas that were dashing completely over it, as wave followed wave in rapid succession!

CHAPTER XVI

LAUNCHING THE LIFEBOAT

"No mistake this time, because that's a vessel on the shoal, as sure as anything!" was what Bob said to himself.

After one more look, to make doubly sure, he dodged back, and caught hold of Thad's arm, shouting:

"There's a bark on the sands out there, Thad! Hark, didn't you hear that shot? They're signaling for help!"

Thad was on his feet instantly. Duty compelled him to forget everything else but the fact that he was in the service of Uncle Sam, and that just then it was his business to try and save life, if it were possible.

As soon as he himself saw the vessel that was in peril, Thad started to show his companion just how the first Coston flare should be lighted, and waved, so as to let those aboard know that their sad plight had been discovered; and assure them that everything possible looking to their rescue would be attempted.

When that small glow sprang up it was a weird spectacle that Bob looked upon, and one he was not likely to soon forget.

The two coast-guards kept a sharp watch as the flare continued to burn, and immediately afterwards; for it was expected that those aboard the stranded vessel would take some means of informing the life-savers that they had seen their signal, and would remain aboard, waiting for the expected assistance.

A minute or two passed after the flare had died out. Then, just when Bob was about to ignite his Coston signal he discovered that some sort of light was being waved to and fro aboard the bark.

"They've seen our signal, and that's the answer!" he shouted, in excitement; for now he knew what the next step must be; and that if it were at all possible to launch the lifeboat, or the lighter surfboat, a rescue would be attempted.

"It's back tuh the house fo' we-uns, Bob!" said Thad, as he saw the waving light, which might have been a ship's lantern, move to and fro for a brief space of time, and then suddenly disappear, as a monster billow swept completely over the bark.

The two started off, making better time now, because they did not have to face the storm so much; and besides, the excitement hurried their footsteps more or less.

Of course Bob many times turned half-way around, and when the lightning played, tried to make

out the position of the vessel; but on account of the increasing distance, and the leaping of the spray, he soon lost all track of the object of their concern.

"Oh! I hope the ship has not been broken up already!" Bob was saying to himself; and he might have asked his companion about it, only talking under those conditions was such a tremendous task, and there was really not a minute to spare.

The two miles seemed very long to impatient Bob. He thought they would never get over the stretch of sand dunes, for as the waves beat high up on the beach it was necessary for them to keep further back, where the walking was three times as difficult.

More than once he caught hold of Thad, and asked whether they must not be close to the home station; and each time, the other, knowing it was impatience that caused Bob to make this inquiry, would hasten to reassure him.

"On'y a leetle bit further, Bob," he kept saying in the ear of the youth; and then the pair of them would once more start to push their way along, reeling at times, and frequently measuring their length on the sand.

At last they sighted the cheery lights ahead that told them they were drawing close to the station. Bob thought of those poor fellows out on that stranded bark, and felt glad that the long tramp had come to an end.

Thad had informed him that there was small likelihood of the stricken vessel going to pieces ere daybreak; and long before then they would reach her, provided the surf allowed the launching of the boat.

Into the station burst Bob and his mate. For a moment they were dazzled by the bright light, in contrast to the gloom through which they had come, and the warm glow of the fire was welcome to their benumbed bodies.

“What is it?” cried Captain Lon, for he seemed to sense news of danger.

“Wreck!” Bob managed to gasp, for Thad could not seem to get his breath. “We saw her—burned our signals—she—she answered!”

“Where is she?” cried several, starting to their feet.

“Out there!” cried Bob, pointing with dripping hand.

“A bark on the Rip-rap Shoals, Cap!” exclaimed Thad, as soon as he could close the door behind himself and Bob, so as to shut out the worst of the storm, and make himself clearly heard.

“Rip-rap Shoals; eh?” cried the keeper of the station as he started immediately to don his oilskins and fasten his battered old sou’wester so that the wind might not snatch it from his head. “They’ve gone and picked out the worst spot to strike that lies to the north of us. How does she lie, Thad?”

"Head on, but the seas are a-breakin' over her bad," replied the experienced surfman, whose practiced eye had taken in all particulars as he scanned the wreck during those brief periods when the lightning flashed.

"Chances are she'll soon broach to, under that pounding," ventured the captain; "and once that happens, so the waves hit her broadside on, she'll go to pieces before mornin'!"

"We got tuh git busy if we want'er fotch any o' them chaps ashore—that's right, Cap," Thad went on to say.

"Sure you've located her right, are ye, Thad?" continued the cautious head of the life-saving crew, for a great deal depended on the accuracy of the information received.

"Take my affidavy on it, Cap; and it's been a heap o' years since I made a blunder. I had my lesson, and I ain't done forgot what a mistake means. She's sure on the Rip-rap Shoals this time."

"All right then, Thad; we'll make in that quarter, and without losing any more time," and Captain Lon's manner told Bob that the old life-saver did not doubt their ability to reach the scene of the wreck, no matter how strong the wind blew and the surf roared.

While this talk was going on every member of the life-saving crew had busied himself making

ready to take his place in the boat which would soon be launched.

Every man had a life belt about his body, since it was a common occurrence for a wave to snatch a member of the crew out of the boat. Under such circumstances he must depend for salvation on the buoyancy of the cork belt, his agility in seizing hold of the life lines along the gunwale of the boat, and the readiness of his companions to clutch hold of him before he had been swept beyond reach.

Just then several men from the main shore came along. They had made their way across the sound despite the danger, under the belief that there might be a wreck on this night, and possibly valuable flotsam come ashore by morning.

These men were not professional wreckers, but all their lives they had come to depend upon the sea to bring them various things worth salving. More than one humble home in Wyamoke had an organ, or even a piano, that had come ashore after some storm, and which, being dried out and fixed, was making music as though it had never been aboard of a vessel broken in two by the wind and waves.

It was no unusual thing for men of the coast to come over to the sandy strip on which the life-saving station lay, when bad weather threatened. Indeed, on more than one occasion the captain, finding himself short-handed when the boat was to be launched, had called not in vain for volunteers;

and those hardy seamen, accustomed all their lives to buffeting the waves, did almost as well as the regular crew.

Nor did the Government allow them to go unrewarded, as the reports will show that extra pay is frequently granted to outsiders on whom the captain in the exercise of his judgment has called.

There had been considerable curiosity shown in that neighborhood concerning the working of the new power lifeboat. As yet it had not been seen in actual service, although there was hardly a day but that the captain had not made use of it, so as to get the run of the arrangements for its working, so different from the old-time method of long oars and muscular strength.

When all the men were ready, a rush was made for that part of the station where both the old and the new lifeboats were kept under shelter.

The heavy craft were so arranged that they could be run down into the water on wheels that ran part of the way on heavy "skids;" and then launched by the combined efforts of the crew, rushing into the sea with the boat and jumping in at a certain moment. Several of the men were supposed to be in their places, ready to make desperate use of the oars in order to keep the boat from being thrown back on the beach with each succeeding wave.

Bob had gone through the drill several times, and

knew the part he was expected to play. True, this practice had taken place during comparatively calm weather; but it had the merit of accustoming each member of the crew to his particular task; so that they would work in perfect unison at the critical time.

“Give way, lads!” shouted the captain, when they were all on hand, ready to attempt the launching of the big power lifeboat.

There was a cheer, for these men went at their work with a vim, as though it appealed to some element in their natures that lived on excitement, and caused them to snap their fingers in the face of danger.

Immediately the boat commenced to move, for everything was kept in perfect condition where Captain Lon Shanley was concerned; and if there had been five score wheels to turn, not one would give out a squeak for lack of lubricating oil.

Six men, counting the captain, were to go in the boat, the others remaining on the beach to stand by and lend assistance when the rescuing party came back—it was to be hoped with the crew of the stranded bark in their company.

Just beyond the reach of the rushing waves a brief halt was made. The keen and experienced eye of the captain must judge accurately at just what instant the last word should be given, and the launching completed. In this he had to take into

consideration the size of the billows, for every third one seemed to far exceed the others in dimensions, and in the fury with which it lashed the shore.

When in his judgment it was right for them to make an attempt the captain would give the word, and away the boat would rush deep into the water, with the pair aboard pulling desperately at their oars so as to keep from having all their work for nothing. Then over the sides would come tumbling the other five stalwart fellows, to drop into their places, and get additional oars working as speedily as possible.

Sometimes things would not go just as they ought, and the consequence was that a second and even a third attempt must be made before the boat could be launched.

But such did not happen to be the case on this night, when Bob Spencer was getting his initiation into the hazardous experience of a life-saver. Captain Lon must have timed things exactly right, for the boat hit the water, pushed forward, was held fairly steady by the pair who sat in their places until the balance could crawl aboard; and then they were off, pulling straight out into the foamy waves, where the full force of the sea swept at them.

CHAPTER XVII

ALONGSIDE THE WRECK

A TREMENDOUS wave broke over the boat the first thing, and drenched them all; but that was a matter of no particular consequence. What did count for a great deal was the fact that they managed to keep the bow of the big boat pointed directly out to sea, and that they were holding their own.

As soon as he knew that it was practical and safe to start the engine, the captain hastened to do so. Crouching there in the wildly-tossing lifeboat he gave several quick whirls to turn the fly wheel, and immediately they felt the convulsive throb that told of his success, for sounds it was next to impossible to hear in all that confusion.

There was now no longer any necessity for using the stout oars, and hence they were taken in, though always kept in readiness for service, should anything go wrong with the gasoline power.

"This beats rowing!" cried Bob, in the ear of the man next him.

"It sure does," was the answer. "We'll be out to her in no time now, but if we had to use the oars there'd be no telling when we'd reach her."

"If the engine gives out, though, we'll have to row," said another member of the crew.

"Oh, don't be a croaker!" he was advised. "This engine isn't going to stop!"

And Bob certainly hoped not, as he looked at the tumbling waters all about him—waters that seemed ready to engulf the small craft, if the vigilance of those aboard was relaxed for an instant.

On swept the sturdy craft, her motor throbbing and humming as the propeller beat the waves to foam.

Knowing that it was necessary to go some two miles or more up the coast, Captain Lon quickly began to steer that way. It required the most delicate judgment in order to avoid letting the seas strike them on the starboard quarter as they ran up the coast. Such a happening would have possibly resulted in a serious catastrophe, for doubtless the boat must be thrown on her beam ends, and capsized.

With an eye that had become proficient through long experience, the steersman watched each billow, and by the aid of the lightning that was still flashing frequently, he managed to keep the boat headed just as close to the danger line as he dared run without taking too great chances.

The men, not having to row, were able now to

look ahead to some extent; which of course Bob was doing, as he felt the keenest curiosity to learn as quickly as possible whether or not the vessel in distress were still where he had first discovered her. He somehow seemed to have a fear that no one would be able to locate the luckless bark, which might have been pounded to pieces before this, despite the assurances to the contrary on the part of Thad.

Every time the lifeboat rose on the top of a comber Bob was to be seen raising himself to make the best use he could of his splendid eyesight.

"There she is!" he suddenly shouted at the top of his voice.

The men greeted the information with a cheer. They took a natural pride in the work for which they had been selected by Uncle Sam; the fact that they were in the employ of the Government always gave them an advantage over ordinary fishermen or oystermen, and on this account they were looked up to with more or less respect by their fellows along the shore.

Captain Lon had also sighted the stranded vessel, and was working so as to come up to the leeward of her. This would be absolutely necessary if they hoped to take off the crew. There were times when the waves proved so extraordinary that even such a method could not be put into practice; and then all sorts of desperate expedients had to be resorted

to in order to get the distressed sailors from their lost vessel into the lifeboat.

Sometimes they had even to be coaxed to jump overboard, and take the chances of the coast-guard picking them up. Then again a line might be passed between the rescuing boat and the wreck, along which the sailors could travel.

"Think we can make it, Cap?" asked Charles Coon, who chanced to be closer to the steersman than any of the others.

The captain only nodded his head. He was too much taken up with the grave problem which it was now his duty to solve, to bother with words; and besides, he did not choose to waste his breath in trying to make himself heard in all that clamor.

Now they could see that there were men clinging to the rigging of the vessel on the shoals. Both main and mizzen masts had gone by the board, and there was considerable wreckage hanging to leeward, which it would be the duty of Captain Lon to avoid, lest he injure the propeller of his powerboat, and thus be forced to depend on oars after all.

Now they were in a position to run up toward the wreck. Bob was keenly awake to everything that was going on. He had dreamed of some day finding himself engaged in just this sort of business, and did not mean to miss any feature connected with the bold rescue.

To these experienced men this was hardly more than an incident, because everything was working so smoothly. They knew only too well what it was to have accidents happen when they were abroad on a stormy night, with inky darkness all around them, and dangers of every kind hovering over their heads; but now the sea was acting in what they considered a reasonable mood, in that they could anticipate its attack, and easily win out.

Closer and still closer they approached the wreck. It was possible to see the figures of the wildly-waving sailors, who had evidently fastened themselves to the rigging that was left, in the hope of being able to resist the efforts of the waves each time they broke over the vessel to carry them off.

Soon even their voices could be heard, borne down on the wind, as they cheered the coming of the life-savers, and begged them not to be easily discouraged. They should have known those men better than to suspect that they would turn back and leave them to their fate, even had the impediments been three times as great; for Captain Lon Shanley had the reputation of being dismayed at nothing.

Now came the risky task of bringing the lifeboat alongside the wreck, for while the waves were breaking over the bark from the other quarter, all the same there was a tremendous rise and fall on the sheltered side, and a number of the life-savers must

exert every endeavor in the effort to fend off, so they might not be swamped.

The men aboard would have to jump to catch the boat on the rise, otherwise they must have a long drop, and might even miss getting aboard, or perhaps break a leg by ill-luck.

In such a case as this the captain of the lifeboat has full authority to give orders, which even exceeds that of the ship captain for the time being. He it is who directs just how the work of rescue may go on; and it is the law of the sea that all headlong rushing and crowding must be avoided, and the captain of the vessel that is in danger must remain on board until the very last, so as to preserve order. That is the reason so many brave commanders go down with their boats and find a hero's grave beneath the waters of the deep.

Goods or baggage of any description may not be taken into a lifeboat until at least every human soul has been saved; and then only with the consent of the one in charge. If any be brought in against the remonstrance of the captain, he is authorized by the Government to throw this immediately overboard.

In the case of the bark that had come on the shoals near Wyamoke Station, there did not appear to be any insurmountable difficulties in the way of rescue. Smoothly the power lifeboat pushed up alongside,

and was fended off by the oars in the hands of the sturdy crew.

Looking up, Bob could see several sailors ready to drop down upon them. Captain Lon shook his fist upwards as he roared:

“Women and children first, you lubbers! Don’t a single one of you dare to drop down, if there’s any such on deck. We’ll toss you overboard if you do!”

Apparently that had the intended effect, for those who had made motions as if about to jump held back. And when the lifeboat arose again on the surface of the next billow, so that those below were brought close to the deck of the wreck, it could be seen that someone, evidently the skipper, was threatening the men with a pistol, possibly saying to them just about what Captain Lon had roared so lustily:

“Women first, always, no matter what happens!”

There was at least one woman aboard, and a sailor could be seen unfastening her from the rigging still clinging to the stump of a mast, where she had been secured to prevent her from being washed away.

Twice more did the lifeboat rise and fall, before they were ready to try and lower her to the willing hands outstretched to receive the poor soul, frightened half to death by the peril of the hour.

Bob was there, ready to assist, and it was a work in which his whole heart seemed wrapped up. For

this had he left home, and taken up his lodging there upon that stormy coast, with but a few hardy men for his daily companions. He wanted to make the most of it, now that the occasion had arrived.

The task of receiving the woman, perhaps the captain's wife, had been accomplished safely, and she was now secure in the lifeboat, watched by those who were about her.

"Now let the men come, one at a time!" Captain Lon sent up in his strong voice. "Don't hurry; take plenty of time, everybody! We're here to save the last man; so if you go overboard instead of into the boat, that's your lookout! Steady now, my hearty; here you are!"

The first sailor made an error of judgment, and missing the boat plunged into the sea; but instantly the captain's hand darted out and clutched hold of his clothes; and as he held on tenaciously, they presently dragged the fellow in, more frightened than hurt.

The next used better judgment, and was able to drop nicely into the waist of the lifeboat, where an open space had been left on purpose for this taking on of the human cargo.

Then came a third and a fourth, with fair luck, and it looked as though they might complete the loading without any serious mishap. The lone woman was kneeling with upraised face and clasped hands. Bob guessed that she must be praying that

her husband, the captain of the ill-fated bark, would be saved along with the members of his crew.

So it went on until seven men had come aboard, and there could not be more than two or three left above. It was at this juncture that the first misfortune seemed to threaten the calculations of Captain Lon; for the next sailor either slipped when he was jumping, or else made an error of judgment; for he struck the side of the lifeboat, and plunged into the sea.

As he must surely have been knocked senseless by the blow, the chances of his being able to help himself were exceedingly slim. So Bob, quick as a flash to conceive and carry out a plan of campaign, instantly threw himself overboard, bent on saving the poor fellow if it could possibly be done. The brave lad did not stop to consider that in so doing he was imperiling his own life.

CHAPTER XVIII

SAFE IN PORT

It might have looked as though this was a very foolhardy play on the part of Bob Spencer. So apparently Captain Lon must have considered it at first; for he gave utterance to a cry of grief as he saw the boy swept away on the crest of the billow that was now receding.

“The rope—take hold here, and pull when he gets his man!” Charles Coon was saying at the top of his voice; and then it could be seen that he was handling the coil that had lain in the bottom of the boat, ready to be tossed to any member of the life-saving crew unfortunate enough to be thrown out of his seat.

Bob had been smarter than any one gave him credit for, since he had instantly passed the loop at the end of the rope over his shoulders, and under his arms, before he made that seemingly rash leap.

Willing hands instantly took hold, and payed the rope out. Presently they could see with the next flash of lightning that Bob had clutched the

stricken sailor, and was trying to swim back toward the boat; though that would have been an impossible task even had he not been encumbered, only for his forethought in connection with that rope.

And so they pulled both in, the swimmer and the man he had surely saved from a watery grave. But when Bob saw how lifeless the poor fellow looked he feared that after all he might have had his trouble for his pains.

"How many more are there of you?" called Captain Lon, as the lifeboat came up once again, so that he could see the skipper of the luckless bark.

"Three counting myself, that's all," was the answer that came in the strong voice of the master mariner who had done his full duty under those trying circumstances, and was evidently not disposed to desert his ship until every one else had been taken off.

"Let another one jump over!" came the order; and this was accomplished without any mishap; perhaps the men were more cautious now, and then again they must have concluded that the lifeboat was there to stick it out until all had been saved, so there was no need of undue anxiety on their part apt to lead to blunders.

The second sailor also succeeded in making it, although he would have toppled over the side of the lifeboat, had not some one quickly thrown an arm around him.

Just then there came an unusual surge that swept the boat away from the side of the wreck, despite all attempts of the surfmen to hold fast.

A shriek rang out as the captain's wife believed they meant to abandon her brave husband to his fate; for signs there were in plenty that the bark could not stand much more of this fierce pounding without breaking up, and in that event anyone aboard of her would have but a slender chance.

Doubtless they would have started the engine to doing its duty in another second; but the man on the wreck, fearing that he might be left there, daringly leaped headlong into the sea, preferring to trust to the chances of being picked up, rather than remain where he was.

Fortunately for him he used excellent judgment as to where he sprang. He had before then noticed the way the current set strongly, after each receding wave; and when the sudden test came he utilized this knowledge, so that it was really the means of saving his life.

When he came to the surface shortly after striking the water, he began to swim lustily toward the boat. The woman was shrieking, and stretching out her hands, first toward the swimmer, and then in the direction of Captain Lon, whom she besought not to leave a brave man to his fate.

Of course there was no such intention on the part of the old and tried life-saver. He would have ex-

hausted every known device before allowing such a doom to fall upon a seaman who had shown himself to be possessed of all those good qualities so highly prized among his class.

As soon as the lifeboat could be steered it was headed for the swimmer. Once or twice it became necessary to suddenly alter their course, in order to avoid being swept crosswise by a billow that washed completely over the wreck; and it was pitiful to hear the cries of the poor wife at such times.

But if it took an hour Captain Lon would persist in his endeavor to lay hold of that seaman. In the end he succeeded in bringing the lifeboat within reach of the other; and assisted by several ready hands, the captain of the bark was brought over the side, to be caught in the arms of his devoted wife.

As seen by the white glare of the lightning flashes that came at frequent intervals, that was a picture of the sea Bob would never forget. It painted some of the perils that accompany those who sail the broad ocean; and at the same time proved to be a splendid example of what the life-savers stand ready to do for the fellows who find themselves at the mercy of the storm.

It afterwards developed that two seamen had been swept overboard before the life-saving crew arrived on the scene. Later on their bodies were found, washed up many miles away from the spot, so

strangely do the ocean currents play tricks with whatever comes within their grasp.

The bark had been known as the *Glendora*, commanded by Captain Nathan Cross. Her cargo consisted for the most part of miscellaneous goods, and her last port had been Hamburg, though at the time of the wreck she was bound for New Orleans.

Of course all would now be lost, and while ample provision may have been made for such a happening in so far as vessel and cargo could be insured, still it is always a serious thing for a skipper to lose his ship, and doubtless Captain Cross would mourn for the luckless *Glendora* full many a year.

Now that all had been successfully taken from the stranded bark, the next thing on the program was to get them safely ashore. This is not always as easy as one might imagine; and many a time have those in an overcrowded lifeboat been thrown out while trying to make a landing through the surf, with not a few fatalities recorded as accompanying such afterclaps in the way of accidents.

Captain Lon was not only a daring commander, but also an exceedingly cautious one. He did not mean to ruin a good night's work by being overzealous about getting his passengers to land.

First of all he must make his way down the shore again, keeping well off land so as to run no unnecessary chances of grounding. Those members of

his crew who had been left behind, assisted by the men who had come over from the mainland, were expected to have a roaring fire started, which would serve as a guide when the returning life-savers hovered just beyond the curling surf, ready to make the swift dash for the shore when their skipper decided the critical moment had arrived.

This fire was plainly visible, even though they were then something like two miles away from it, and at times the play of the storm shut out their view.

Once again did the sturdy men of the lifeboat get ready to make use of their ashen blades, in case anything went wrong with the machinery of the craft while in the act of passing through or over the surf.

Now they had reached the position which was just opposite the station, and here the men knew what depth of water they could expect, from a fathom upwards.

That trained eye of the captain was watching for their chance, and nothing would tempt him to start until he was sure the proper time had arrived; for he had shut off the power, and the boat was being held only by the array of oars which bristled along either side.

Up and down they rose and fell as the billows swept along, to break just beyond, and go spinning

and roaring toward the sandy beach, upon which they fell with a dull roar.

“Now—give way!” suddenly roared the captain, as he saw the right opening; and like a machine six oars took hold, sending the lifeboat whirling toward the shore on the summit of the largest billow that they had yet seen.

It was like a ride on an avalanche to Bob, so exhilarating, so absorbing, that he felt as though he could hardly breathe while they shot steadily onward toward the beach.

“Faster, men!” roared Captain Lon, as he noticed that they were not holding their own with the onrushing wave as well as they might; and at that their backs were bent more sturdily than ever, so that which had been lost was regained, and they went in gloriously.

Almost before the heavy lifeboat had touched the sand, some of the crew were overboard; and among them agile Bob, seizing hold along the sides, so as to prevent the retiring wave from carrying their property back with it into the maw of the ever-hungry sea.

After that it was easy enough, for succeeding waves failed to reach the high mark set by the one selected as his courser by Captain Lon. Besides, others were on hand ready and willing to give assistance, so that the boat was speedily drawn further up on the beach, to where it could later be taken

into its shelter by means of the handy wheels, and the tramway intended for their traveling.

"In at last!"

"It was a hard rescue, boys!"

"I'm glad I was one of the party," said Bob, his eyes flashing.

"Thank God for saving my husband and myself, and the others," murmured the captain's wife.

There were shouts and cheers in plenty; for they knew that another triumph had been added that night to the long list of glorious rescues engineered by capable Captain Lon and his hardy surfmen of Wyamoke Station.

When the wreckers learned the nature of the miscellaneous cargo contained in the ill-fated bark *Glendora*, they waited impatiently for day to break, in order that they might be first on the ground, seeking favorite nooks where eddies always drifted these argosies of the stormy seas, and all manner of valuable stuff could be gathered in by willing workers.

This is a part of the results of a wreck on the coast that the crew of a life-saving station are debarred from taking any share in; the Government will not permit them to act as wreckers, at least with any idea of selfish gain.

These men who so dauntlessly take their lives in their hands in order to save wrecked sailors are looked to by the general public in the localities of

the various stations for assistance in overcoming difficulties, and meeting divers situations that would ordinarily fall upon the local authorities, or private interests.

Sometimes it is a fire that threatens the community, and the crew gallantly respond to fight it to a finish. They have found straying children, as well as restored to the owners lost property, though allowed to take no reward for such services. And in not a few instances on record they have been compelled to assume the duties of police, in apprehending thieves, or assisting to round up smugglers who have come secretly in upon the coast nearby, with their illicit cargoes of contraband goods.

Their entire willingness to be of assistance to the people among whom they or their families dwell, has always been the means of making the life-saving crews highly respected; and so it happens that in case of a member of the crew being unable to attend to his work in a case of necessity, plenty of willing recruits are to be had for the asking among the young fishermen of the vicinity, who are under obligations to the captain of the station, for many favors received.

The rescued people were taken into the shelter, and given warm clothes, or else allowed to dry themselves before a big fire. Then hot coffee was served out to them by the members of the first

watch; while those who had as yet not taken their trick along the shore set out to cover the ground again; for records of two and even three wrecks in succession on the same night were not uncommon in that dangerous section of the coast—and dawn was still some hours away.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BEACH COMBERS

ALL the following day the storm continued to rage, and Captain Lon made sure to keep a constant lookout for signs of other vessels in distress. Fortunately, however, the wreck of the *Glendora* turned out to be the only incident of the kind along that strip of coast.

Reports that came to them later told of serious times in other sections of the patrolled territory from Fernandina in Florida all the way up to the Delaware breakwater; for fully a dozen vessels were driven on the sands, or lost in the breakers along the Atlantic seaboard before that first West India storm of the season had exhausted its violence.

On the second day the life-savers were pretty well tired out from their continuous labors. They welcomed the coming of the sun, because that would mean a day of rest for all of them, of which they were greatly in need.

But if the men of the coast-guard were ready to take things easy at this time, after the storm had

passed away up toward Halifax, there were those who expected to put in a strenuous day's work.

These were the people from the mainland, the wreckers, or "beach combers" as the captain called them. News had gone forth that the wreck had been laden with a miscellaneous cargo, which would of course be found strewn all along the outer beach, as the sea currents carried the various things ashore.

Consequently every man and boy, yes, and a few sturdy women as well, who could leave home and get across the sound by any possible means, seemed to be on hand, to wander up and down the beach, waiting for new prizes to appear as the tide changed from ebb to flood.

Bob, having secured a few hours of sleep, was once more abroad. These sights were all so new to the boy that he felt he could not afford to miss any of them. Besides, he meant to write a long letter home to his mother later in the day, describing all that he had passed through, and would like to have other things of interest to tell her besides his share in the saving of the sailors belonging to the *Glendora*.

He had not the slightest doubt in the world but that already the folks at home had read about the wreck of the bark close to Wyamoke Station. They were apt to closely scan the papers every day to glean any news that might filter through their

columns concerning that particular district. Indeed, Bob knew for a fact that one of the very first things his father had done when it was decided he should enlist in Uncle Sam's service, was to subscribe for a prominent New York newspaper which made a specialty of all maritime news.

And having read how the crew at Wyamoke so gallantly rescued those who were in peril of their lives from the raging seas, Bob felt full sure that they must be anxiously awaiting some news directly from the member of the Spencer family who was now connected with that station, second only to Hatteras in point of importance.

Of course during that afternoon, while carrying out his little plans, it was only natural that the boy's thoughts should go out more or less to the home circle. He pictured them reading the long letter he meant to write very soon now, describing his first actual experience as a member of the coast-guard and life-saving crew at Wyamoke Station. Yes, he could once again see their well-loved faces, and chief above all the rest came the never-to-be-forgotten one of his mother.

That of course brought to his mind the subject of the lost watch, and he tried to comfort himself with the hope that Dave must by this time have found it; for on the day after his arrival, Bob had written to his brother, as he determined while on the train, explaining just how he came to lose the

treasured time-piece, where it was likely to be discovered in the long grass alongside the road at the place shaded by the elm with the wide-spreading branches, and even going so far as to describe just where he had secreted the garden rake, so that Dave might make use of that implement if necessary.

At any day now Bob might expect to have a letter from Dave, telling him that he had carried out the instructions, and found the time-piece, which was once more in the possession of the owner.

He had had already one letter from his mother, as well as a newsy communication from his brother Fred; yet neither of them so much as even mentioned the lost watch. Perhaps his mother believed that he had carried it away with him, unthinkingly, and in the generosity of her heart purposely refrained from mentioning it. Bob fairly writhed as he allowed this idea to take possession of his mind.

But there was only one thing he could do, apparently, if Dave failed to find the lost watch, and this was to write to his mother, confessing the truth. Then, after he had been paid his first wages, which would be in a month, he hoped, in a letter to Frank, to entrust this money with his desire to have the other in some way manage to duplicate the lost watch.

Bob clung to this idea whenever memory caused him to think of the misfortune that had come to

him on that night of the barn dance. It gave him a certain amount of comfort too; for the boy was very sincere in his desire to make all the amends possible. Still, he thought it a little queer that his mother did not even mention a word about it in her letter. Perhaps she would later on, when this might give him the desired opening to confess to the sad truth.

Then, while his thoughts were taking a backward turn, of course he remembered the old sailor, Captain Osgood, and the little adventure that had brought them together. He was expecting to receive a letter from the genial old seaman any day now, when he meant to answer promptly, thanking him heartily for what he had done in writing to the Washington people.

As Bob had a little spare time to himself he took his camera, a present from his uncle, and went out on the beach to get some pictures of the wreckers at work. They were busy salving the cargo that was washing ashore from the broken-up vessel.

Now it would be some heavy timber from the destroyed craft that would be washed up, and all efforts were directed to getting this out of the way, so that no one would be injured by being pounded with it.

Again some box or barrel would roll up with the waves, and then there would be a scramble to see who of the wreckers would get this choice piece of

cargo. Often there was almost a fight, which was stopped only when more refuse washed in.

On the beach Bob was joined later by the captain, who must have been watching what the lad was doing with more or less interest, as his first remark proved.

"Taking some pictures of our busy workers, are you, Bob? Well, they're reaping a harvest this day such as they ain't run across for some years, I reckon. And the piles of stuff along the shore will keep many a family in comfort this coming winter. The old *Glendora* was the biggest bonanza that could have happened to a heap of these natives. Only for her coming some of the same would have gone hungry, I'm thinking; because it's been a poor season for fishin', and the oysters don't show up as they ought to, I'm told."

"Yes, I thought such a chance to get a lot of views might never come along again," Bob explained; "and I'm sure my people at home, so far away from the ocean, will be glad to see them. I want to get a group of all my mates, with you in the middle, Captain; that is, if you don't mind posing for me."

"Any time you see the chance, just let us know," replied Captain Lon, with a good-natured smile; "I'll let you snap off the drill with the boats, and any other pictures you want that'll show the folks what life-saving on the coast is like. And as for

the boys, sure they'll be only too glad to have their pictures took. If they turn out real good we'll all want a copy, and pay hard cash for it too, lad, remember that. But how d'ye like your new mates?"

"I don't think I could have struck a finer lot of surfmen along the whole coast!" declared Bob, with considerable enthusiasm. "And it's owing a good deal to the way they've been handled. Thad Wappinger is as true as steel; Ezra Carpenter I know would go through fire and water for you; Don Squeers is the most powerful man with the oars that I ever knew; Charlie Coon is your right bower, and could fill your shoes if you were taken sick, better than any other member of the crew; while the others, Asa Barnes, Ben Whitlatch and Chip Bannister are diamonds in the rough, as my mother would say; which means that if they lack polish, they are hard workers, and can be depended on every time."

"That's as neat a compliment as I ever had paid me, lad," declared the captain of the Wyamoke life-saving crew. "I reckon there ain't going to be any trouble about you and the rest of the men getting on fine. They think just as much of you in the bargain; and we're all better off on 'count of your coming; because, you see you've been brought up different from the rest of us, and can teach us lots of things we ain't used to. This same strip of coast ain't much in the line of educating a man, you will

admit, Bob. It's a kind of life that's bounded by five miles every way, all the year for me, and from the first of August till the end of May for the rest of the crew. The most pleasure we get is our reading. That's why we take papers, and some of the magazines, to help kill the time."

"But whenever a storm comes along you don't have to complain of any laziness, I take it," laughed Bob, as he looked around to see if there was any other picture he might snap off, before carrying his little camera into the shelter house, as the afternoon was now getting along, and he must really be about his letter writing, if he wanted to send it off with the one who was going to take the captain's official report over to the little post-office at Wyamoke, bringing back the mail for the station.

"Well, hardly," replied the captain, "as you know yourself from experience after night before last. But so the life of a coast-guard goes along; one time he's wishing for something to happen to wake him up; and a little later he's so badly worked that he could sleep standing. We take the fat with the lean, and count it all in a lifetime. Men have to be that way when they enlist in this business. And lad, in time I reckon you'll get the better of that nervous way you have of wanting to do everything in three winks. This will be a splendid school for you, just as your uncle said."

Bob did not choose to enlighten the captain on

that point, and admit that it was along entirely different lines that his uncle was speaking when he said that. For there must have flashed before the boy's memory numerous scrapes in which he had been concerned while in the home town of Clayton. For Bob surely believed he had turned over a new leaf, and that never again was he going to be guilty of such boyish pranks, as would be unbecoming to one who was enlisted in the service of Uncle Sam.

"And so far as I have gone it seems to be just what my heart has always been set on," the boy continued, with a sigh as of contentment. "Ever since I can remember, Captain Lon, it seems to me that the things that inspired me most of all were stories of brave men who went about trying to save others from trouble. I read all about the fire-fighters of the big cities, and at first thought I would like to follow that profession when I got older; but my love for the water caused me to change my mind; and then it was the work of the life-savers along the coast that I began to dream about. And sometimes I can hardly believe that those dreams have come true. Why, every time I wake up in the night I have to pinch myself, for I seem to think it's all unreal, and that my brothers must be sleeping close beside me."

"Well, I certain sure hope, lad," remarked the captain, as he arose to go away, "you'll keep on liking the life, because we'd all hate to lose you

now. You've only been with us a few days, but as Asa Barnes was saying this morning, seems like we'd known you a long time."

Bob flushed with pleasure. It was something new in his experience to discover that he had made so fine an impression on a group of hard workers such as these life-savers were.

"There's a man I'd like to take a picture of, Captain Shanley," he remarked, to cover his confusion. "He's got a face as dark as a Spaniard, and one that I'm sure contains a heap of character, though of the wrong sort, because I don't like his sly smile, or the way he shrugs his shoulders while he talks with some of the wreckers. He hasn't seemed to pick up a single thing, but just saunters along the beach, smoking a cigarette like a lord, looking out to sea now and then, and stopping to chat with some of the men. I wonder now, if I could watch my chance and get a snapshot of his face without him getting mad?"

"Who's that, Bob?" queried the captain, as he delayed his departure, and turned to observe which way the boy nodded; "oh! I see, you mean that slim man who seems so much better dressed than the majority of the wreckers. To tell you the truth he's something of a mystery to the rest of us. Every once in a while he bobs up at Wyamoke, and always comes over here to the beach, to walk for miles up and down, forever looking out yonder as

if he expected to see a sail. Some of the boys, among themselves of course, for they wouldn't be likely to say it to his face for fear of making him angry, because he has a bad look about him, call him Robinson Crusoe looking for a sail to come to his rescue. But his real name is Jose Lopez, and I reckon he's a Cuban."

Bob felt a queer sensation pass over him as he heard Captain Lon mention that name. Once again he was with his Uncle Dave, and listening to him tell of the doings of bold smugglers, among whom he had surely mentioned a Cuban named Jose Lopez.

And that there could be no mistake—that this was the same Lopez of whom he had heard his uncle speak—Bob was sure. For, as the dark-featured man turned, and gave the boy a chance for a good look at him, our hero caught a peculiar gleam from one of the man's eyes as the sun struck on it.

"That's a glass eye—sure!" whispered Bob to himself.

Then, if further proof were needed, at that moment one of the wreckers secured a large case of what seemed to be a valuable bit of cargo.

"Bravo! Bravo!" cried the man called Lopez, and in his excitement he began pulling on his finger knuckles—snapping them like castanets. Bob watched him eagerly.

CHAPTER XX

THE SMOKE ON THE HORIZON

“ So that is Jose Lopez ; is it ? ” said Bob, taking another good look at the dark-faced man who was paying no attention to them, as he stood nearby, talking with one of the beach combers, and now and then casting one of his anxious glances far out toward the level horizon to the east, where the sea lay low against the sky.

Captain Lon glanced quickly at his youthful companion.

“ Seems like some of the men must have been tellin’ you about him then, eh, lad ? ” he remarked.

“ No, I heard his name while I was in Washington,” replied Bob, at the same time deciding that it was perfectly safe to take the other fully into his confidence with regard to all his uncle had said.

“ You don’t tell me ! ” exclaimed the captain of the life-saving crew. “ Well, now, I kind of think that’s queer you should hear about Lopez before you came here. Is he a friend of that uncle of yours, son ? ”

Bob chuckled at that, as he went on to say :

"Well, they hardly speak as they pass by, I reckon, sir. Fact is, if I stepped out right now, and introduced myself to Senor Lopez as a nephew of the David Spencer connected with the United States Secret Service, chances are he'd give me one look, and then say good afternoon."

This rather mystified the chief of the coast-guards, for he looked toward the dark-faced man and then at Bob, after which he said:

"Now you've sure got me guessin', Bob. Judging from what you say, they ain't much of friends, that's dead certain. Fact is, sounds like they might be rather like enemies. Is that what you mean to tell me, Bob?"

Bob nodded his head in the affirmative.

"My uncle has made a lot of enemies in his time, because his business is to run down all sorts of men who are engaged in defrauding the Government. Some do it in making moonshine whiskey, for which they don't mean to pay the revenue tax. Others manufacture counterfeit money, you know; and they are the worst of the lot, because innocent people suffer through their work. But there's another pack that have to be watched and caught whenever they make a slip. They call them smugglers!"

Captain Lon wagged his head, to show he understood. Plainly he was deeply interested in all that Bob said.

"Yes, we've heard some little talk about them along this same strip of coast, and how they like to land after night somewhere, with a cargo of Havana cigars, or silk or opium, that ought to be paying a great big revenue to the people up at Washington, in the way of duty. But then we never bothered our heads much about the same, 'cause we didn't allow we'd ever run across any of the critters. Smugglers, hey? And say, do you mean to tell me, Bob, that Jose Lopez might be one o' that crowd?"

He glanced toward the Cuban with increased respect. As a seeming loungeur who had no particular business, the man may have possessed a certain amount of interest in the eyes of Captain Lon; but in the guise of a bold smuggler he assumed a new aspect entirely.

"Yes, and connected with the king pin of the lot, my uncle said," Bob went on, in a lowered voice; for the object of their conversation had just looked their way by accident, and the boy did not wish to take the slightest chance of his words being overheard.

"Who might that be?" continued Captain Lon.

"Another Cuban, or a Spaniard, known as Black Carlos, because he is so dark-featured. Does it strike you as if you'd heard of him, Captain Lon?"

"Yes, I've caught the name somewhere, or else read about his doings," replied the other. "But

sakes alive, son, I never did dream I'd set eyes on a genuine smuggler in my day. Wreckers are bad enough; and we've had trouble in times gone by with some hard cases who'd even set a false light on the shore just to lure a vessel on the shoals in stormy weather; but them days are long gone by. Smuggler, is he? Well, what would he want around here, d'ye think, Bob?"

Somehow it seemed as though the captain of the station depended considerably on his new recruit to solve the puzzle. Perhaps he remembered that Bob had an uncle in the Secret Service, who was used to unraveling knotty problems; and it seemed as though a Spencer ought to be equal to anything.

Of course it rather pleased the young fellow to see how the captain looked to him in this little emergency. And he was just as ready to use his best endeavors in helping the other out, as he would be to jump overboard and assist anyone who was threatened with drowning.

"I should think there might be only one thing that would bring a chap of his calling to the beach," Bob went on to observe, meaningly.

The captain whistled softly under his breath. His eyes were kindling with increasing excitement. Here was a positively new element entering into his life, which may have been stormy enough along other lines, yet in the past always confined to certain elements of danger after all.

"Landing of tobacco, I reckon you mean, lad?" he breathed, softly.

"Yes, looking to defrauding the Government out of the revenue; for you know there is a pretty high duty on imported cigars. If a good-sized cargo can be safely brought ashore, so as to slip past the revenue officers, it might mean thousands of dollars in the pockets of the smugglers."

"Right you are, son," muttered Captain Lon. "And from what I've read and heard about these same smugglers, they are apt to be a pretty daring set, all around."

"My uncle has told me lots of yarns about his adventures with them," Bob admitted, "and some of them made me have a fine old thrill. Yes, and if looks count for anything I should say right now that your friend Lopez over there would give the officers a heap of trouble, if he found himself in danger of being caught in a trap."

"Well, now, seems to me that's true as preachin', lad," remarked the life-saver, nodding his head as though he agreed perfectly with the opinion Bob expressed. "And as you say, he keeps lookin' out to sea every little while, just like he expected to see some sort of a signal away over yonder. D'ye think he's calculatin' on usin' our beach right here to land a cargo on?"

The very idea must have struck Captain Lon as

a stupendous one, for his voice fairly quivered with eagerness as he made this remark.

"I shouldn't be surprised if that was what he had in his mind," Bob replied. "He isn't the one to come over here just to watch the beach-combers gather up their stuff. He's seen plenty of that in his day, and there, he's shading his eyes with his hand to take another look away out there."

"That's right, and it isn't the white gull flyin' along yonder that interests Lopez, either, lad. P'raps now he's lookin' for signs of smoke on the horizon. P'raps he's worried some for fear his smugglin' craft may have gone down in that tropical storm we had, though off to sea it couldn't have been so very bad, where they run no danger of breakers or sand shoals."

"Uncle Dave told me that they always choose a dark night to run their cargoes ashore," Bob went on to say.

"Then this here night would be just the thing for it," added the other; "for it's going to be as black as a pocket, I reckon, though clear enough, with stars above to show the way, and the little waves rollin' up on the beach to tell you where to walk. Do you really reckon, Bob, that this here Lopez is expectin' a visit from some of his Cuban friends to-night?"

"Looks that way to me," answered the boy, confidently, as in imagination he pictured himself

taking part in a foray which might result in the capture red-handed of the notorious smuggler, Black Carlos, himself, as well as his right-hand helper, Jose Lopez.

If the idea gave him a decided thrill, who could blame the boy? His soul was fashioned along the adventurous order, where such things really appealed to him; and he must have come by this love for excitement honestly, because they said the Spencers were always a bold lot, ready to take service wherever they could find things moving lively.

Captain Lon drew in a long breath. Somehow that simple little action seemed to tell Bob the other had seen his duty, and meant to perform the same, no matter at what cost.

"I'm in the service of the United States Government," began the head of the coast-guard patrol, as though reasoning with himself concerning what might be expected of him in circumstances like this; "and my duty is to stand by my employer, no matter what comes along. If so be these smugglers think they can make use of *my* beach as a harbor for landin' their stuff, and not be disturbed, they've got another guess a-comin' to 'em, that's what."

"Then you'll try to stop the game; is that what you mean, Captain Lon?" inquired Bob, eagerly.

"Sure I will, lad; and you may be one of the crowd if you like, just because it was through you

I caught on to the ugly business. Now, I wouldn't wonder if this same smart Lopez has been and landed more'n a few cargoes right under our noses here, and none of us a whit the wiser. Why, we never dreamed about such a thing as *him* being a smuggler; and we knew right well he didn't have the cut of a wrecker. Now that you've put me wise to his make-up I can see lots of things clearer. And that tells me what he was over here for so often, months ago, when I used to stay alone, keepin' charge of the station in the slack season. Seems like he must think we're a blind lot around this here section, and so he's gettin' bolder."

"Look out yonder, and tell me if that isn't a smudge of black smoke just rising over the horizon, Captain Lon!" broke in the boy, somewhat excitedly.

The experienced coast-guard turned his eyes in the direction indicated by his companion. He had a vision that was as keen as that of a hawk; and being accustomed to scanning long distances was instantly in a position to agree with what Bob had said.

"Just what she is, lad. There's some sort of steam craft out there right now; and seems like they might have made that extry black smoke as a signal. Wait till Lopez takes another squint out that-aways, and see if he acts like it tickled him. Then we'll have something to go by."

So they waited and watched. The Cuban was

sauntering slowly along ahead of them, stopping now and then to speak with any of the beach-combers who might be carrying their spoils across the stretch of sand to the border of the sound. Here they had means for ferrying the same across to the mainland, in the shape of all manner of native sail-boats, peculiar in rig to the region, as is always the case down along the Atlantic coast.

Presently the two who were keeping just a certain distance behind Lopez saw him once again turn eagerly toward the wide sea, and take another look that way.

Bob held his breath with suspense. He felt that in another minute the suggestive actions of the man would either allay their suspicions or else confirm them. And he was right about that.

Lopez was seen to start, and take a second quick look; then as he turned away a satisfied smile spread all over his swarthy face. Plainly he had discovered the smoke smudge hovering just above the sea level far out, and it had given him a feeling bordering on triumph.

"You see," remarked Captain Lon, in a low but tense voice; "we hit the target in the bull's-eye that time, son; because that same smoke means a whole lot to Senor Lopez right now. And I reckon our work's cut out for us this same night, my lad."

CHAPTER XXI

ON THE TRACK OF THE SMUGGLER

“COAST-GUARDS have to do all sorts of queer things at times; don’t they, Captain Lon?” Bob remarked, a little later, as they made their way back toward the station; for it was the announced policy of the keeper to partake of an early supper, so as to be in position to follow the Cuban who was under the ban of suspicion, should he start to walk far up or down the beach.

“Well, it does seem that way, son,” replied the other, with a chuckle. “If I’d take the trouble to tell ye the many different things the people around here look to Uncle Sam’s employees for, it’d make ye smile. I’ve fit fires, gone out on the ice of the sound during a bitter winter season, to find a lad that was lost, and in danger of being drowned, if so be he fell into a hole, searched for lost hosses and cows, revived men that had been in the water nigh long enough to ‘a’ gone across to the other world, played doctor, when the regular physic-giver was out of town; recovered bodies, helped to bury the same,

kept a wounded hunter from bleedin' to death—and so it goes. And I reckons as **how** we're even expected to surprise smugglers, and try to capture the same, if so be they try to ply their trade near by our station."

"Well, it's a great thing to be a coast-guard, and a life-saver," declared Bob; at which the other surveyed him with kindly eyes.

"Them words do ye a heap of credit, lad; because in my humble opinion there ain't no life equal to it. Why, I wouldn't change my lot with the President of these here United States, even if I was able to do his business, which of course I ain't. We got our app'inted place to fill in the world; and all that's expected of us is to see our duty, and do it."

"How many men will you take with you, if we go out smuggler hunting to-night?" the boy presently asked.

"Well, I reckon that three besides us ought to be enough," was the reply, after a brief period of reflection. "Course I had ought to tell the whole lot what we're meaning to do, and I'll put Charles Coon in charge of the station while I'm off on this side hunt. He knows how to run things, because some day he 'spects to have charge here, when my time's up; or I'm took, as lots of life-savers are, by one of the storms we keep on fightin' year in and year out."

Accustomed to looking this possibility in the face, Captain Lon's voice did not even quiver in the least as he thus remarked about his possible fate.

"Senor Lopez seems to always keep *above* the station, you notice, sir," continued Bob; "and from that I rather think he means to hike off in that direction later on, when it begins to get dark, and he believes nobody'll be watching him."

"Just as I was thinkin', lad; just as I was sayin' to myself. And so I'll make it that you, Ezra Carpenter, Asa Barnes and Thad Wappinger start out to patrol on the first watch. We'll keep along with 'em, and in that way can cover the senor, if so be he makes up the shore."

The prospect pleased Bob immensely. It smacked of adventure in the end, and that was what he loved. If only they could make a haul of these daring smugglers who had so long been snapping their fingers at such Government agents as his own uncle, what a feather that would be in his cap; and how pleased the folks at home would be when they heard about it!

The life-savers were gathering now with the prospect of getting their evening meal. The position of cook was filled by turns, so that all of them had their share of the work; though of course some were favorites, on account of being able to get up meals that appealed to the appetites of the hearty eaters more than others whose education along those

lines had been neglected; or who had no natural aptitude for the task.

Captain Lon beckoned to such as were furthest away, and who came, wondering greatly what might be in the wind; for the serious look on the face of the keeper impressed them as significant.

Their astonishment was great when they heard what he had to relate concerning the dark-featured Cuban whom they had known for a year or more now, and yet whose occasional visits to the beach they had somehow looked upon as mere excursions along the line of curiosity, on the part of one who had enough of this world's goods to be able to take life easy.

Smugglers they had often heard of in some sort of remote way; but up to now none of them had ever found a chance to say he had come in contact with the bold breed of revenue evaders.

"Who's agoin' tuh have a hand in the leetle game with yuh, Cap'n?" asked Thad, eagerly, the first thing after the station keeper had in his terse fashion imparted the information already known to the reader.

"Well, that's been already arranged in my mind," replied Captain Lon, knowing that he was going to disappoint a number of his followers. "It just happens that them that have the first watch are Bob here, Ezra, Thad and Asa, so I'll take that many along, and the pair that find their shift on the South

beach will start out as usual. That's the best I c'n do, boys."

When the three who had been selected to accompany Captain Lon and Bob learned in this way of their good fortune, their weather-beaten faces expanded in broad smiles, that told how much sincere pleasure the fact gave them.

Supper was hurried along much faster than usual. In fact it seemed as though on this particular occasion there was to be no lack of cooks, for every one of the trio selected to go upon the little hunt up the beach appeared only too willing to aid the member of the crew whose duty it chanced to be to prepare meals on this day. They even got in each other's way, and the keeper had to draw the line by recalling Thad and Asa, leaving Ezra, who was by long odds the best cook of all, to render what aid he could.

And all the while one man was kept outdoors, with orders to have a watchful eye on the Cuban, and notify the captain should he show any signs of making off, no matter in what direction.

Of course there would be a great disappointment if he appeared to accompany any of the beach combers over to the shore of the sound, as though intending to return with them to the mainland. But even should this occur, Captain Lon did not believe that his suspicions were to be without some

basis; since it would be easy for the slippery smuggler to say he had forgotten something, and start back as if to return to the beach, only to vanish in the scrub after he had gone part way across the strip of sandy waste on which the life-saving station stood.

"Anyway, we'll get him if he tries anything crooked," said Bob, "and that's something."

"And it may prove a good deal, lad," added the captain.

Bob and the captain left the house together. The rest of the men had been warned that if they appeared they must not show the least interest in anything that was going on; and in particular not to notice Jose Lopez, should he still be lingering near.

At first Bob began to fear they had already missed their man, for the Cuban did not seem to be in sight anywhere.

Chip Bannister was walking up and down the beach a little distance away, and as he had been the one sent out by Captain Lon to keep track of the suspect, they sauntered in his direction.

Without doing anything to arouse suspicion they presently joined the other.

"Where is he at, Chip?" asked the captain, immediately, his words voicing the fear that had commenced to tug at Bob's heart.

It was beginning to get dusk, and already one could not see any great distance up the beach. Voices told where possibly the last of the wreckers were coming along, carrying their loads of plunder, and perhaps telling each other how they meant to return at peep of day, when a good fortune may have sent still other spoils ashore.

"He's with that bunch over thar, Cap," replied the rough surfman. "Last I seen o' him he war walkin' up thataways. Mebbe so he reckons to keep company with 'em and go over in ther boat; and agin mebbe he don't. We'll soon know, 'cause they be startin' acrost right now, ye see."

"Don't seem to be looking too hard," cautioned the keeper of the station; "for when a man is engaged in a business like smuggling, chances are he'll be suspicious of every little thing. I'll point out to sea, and the rest of ye act like you was lookin' to notice what I was a-showin' ye."

In this clever way did Captain Lon seek to dislodge any suspicion that might have caused the other to watch them as they stood there.

Bob liked the game tremendously. He played his part well, and yet at the same time managed to cast frequent side glances toward the coming group of beach combers, reporting what he saw to his companions.

"He isn't with them, Captain Lon," Bob went on

to say, in a low tone; "I can see the whole three men, and none of them is of the same build as Senor Lopez. There, I've sighted him now, and he's walking *up* the beach, bending over like he might be looking for something he'd lost. Perhaps that was what he told the wreckers when they asked him to go back with them. Perhaps he said he had a boat of his own over on the sound side, and would row across later, with the lights of the village to guide him."

Captain Lon gave vent to an exclamation, and then started to speak.

"Well, now, son, that's an ijee of yours, sure it is! Queer how I never set myself to wondering just how they might get the stuff across to the mainland, even if they was successful in dropping in to the beach here, and putting it all ashore. Course they must have a boat somewhere, and I reckon as how it might be a swift power-boat in the bargain; so if they was chased they could show a clean pair of heels to anything we had around these waters."

"Hadn't we better be making a move, Captain?" queried Bob, fearful lest they lose sight of the suspected man, and then find great difficulty in carrying out the plan they had arranged.

"Yes, go to the house, and tell the three I've selected to come along," replied the keeper, turning to Chip Bannister.

After the surfman had hastened away, Captain Lon went on to add:

"Course Lopez knows that we patrol a strip of beach more'n two miles to the No'th of here; so he won't be apt to stop short of the end of the beat, which he must 'a' marked many a time when he's walked up that way. Chances are he'll go several miles beyond that place; and already I've got in my mind a neat little cove where the water is deep enough for boats to land, and which would be just the place to suit him."

"I'm glad to hear that, sir," remarked Bob, wishing the other three men would hurry, for the retreating figure of Lopez could be just dimly seen as he kept on going further and further away.

Hastening footsteps announced their coming; and presently the three showed up. The glow in the West, where the sun had gone down, was fading away, and away out to sea the darkness had already gathered, so that the beach was now shrouded in more or less gloom.

"Now," said Captain Lon, who had undoubtedly already mapped out their course of proceeding, "we'll move back here where the scrub'll help to shelter us, in case he turns his head every little while. And remember, men, not a sound must any one make, even a whisper, 'less I speak to him. We may have some ticklish business ahead of us this night, a right heap more dangerous nor takin' folks

off a sinkin' vessel, in the bargain. Put your best foot forward, and follow me!" with which words he started to move up the shore, in pursuit of the mysterious Lopez.

CHAPTER XXII

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

WHEN the three coast-guards had come out to join Captain Lon and Bob they had, acting on the orders of the keeper, brought with them a couple of shot-guns which belonged to members of the crew, and which proved useful during much of the winter season in securing ducks, geese and occasionally a cottontail rabbit, to eke out the bill of fare provided by the Government.

One of these weapons was handed to Bob, while Asa Barnes kept the second gun. Possibly the others may have had small arms about their persons; Bob understood this to be a fact, for he had seen Captain Lon open a box, and put something that glistened like polished steel in one of the pockets of his pea-jacket which he had on at the time, because the night air would be cool.

They were careful not to move along too fast, because they did not want to reduce the distance separating them from the Cuban, unless it must be done on account of increasing darkness.

No doubt he would glance back frequently, de-

sirous of knowing whether the patrol had started out, since it was about time for the regular exodus.

In their eagerness the men several times tripped, making a little noise; whereupon the keeper warned them to be more careful, and look closer where they were putting their feet. A stumble of this sort later on might play havoc with all their well-laid plans, since it must warn the supposed smuggler that he was being watched.

Gradually decreasing the distance as the darkness came on apace, they managed to keep Lopez in sight, though it required keen vision to make sure of this; and Bob was fain to admit that some of these men of the coast were able to see better than he could take credit for doing.

Finally they had arrived at the place where the patrol was in the habit of halting for a spell, before covering the ground again back to the station.

Still the shadowy figure flitted on ahead, and there could no longer be the least doubt about the nature of the mission that brought him so far along the North beach. When this was assured Bob breathed freer, because all the while he had been afraid it might after all turn out to be a false alarm, and that they would have their trouble for their pains.

Before starting forth Bob had made sure to slip something into a pocket which he fancied might possibly come in handy. This was a little flash-light

electric torch which Dave had made him a present of before he left home.

Still Lopez was moving up the beach. He certainly meant business, if this long tramp stood for anything, Bob thought. People do not start out after dark, to navigate along a lonely beach for miles, unless they have some positive object in view.

Several times the boy turned to gaze out to sea, wondering whether he might discover any sign there to tell that the mysterious steamer or tug, the black smoke of which they had seen before sundown, might be making for the shore. But all was darkness as far as he could see; and if such were the case those aboard must have been duly warned not to show even a single light.

From what he had heard the captain say, it promised to be an ideal night for such an enterprise as running a contraband cargo ashore. The surf was low, and in the particular place mentioned by Captain Lon a boat could easily navigate to the cove, where a landing might be made.

Evidently Lopez knew this, too; had it been otherwise the chances were he would have found some means of communicating with those aboard the smuggler craft, to warn them that it would be best to keep off-shore until another night.

About this time Bob became aware of the fact that he could catch occasional glimpses of some sort of light ahead. It came and went in a strange way that

puzzled him not a little at first. Then suddenly he chuckled as he guessed the truth, and that Lopez must possess the same sort of a little hand torch as reposed in his own pocket.

Yes, Lopez apparently deemed it safe to make frequent use of this in order to see where he was about to set his foot, in continuing to advance.

They had been going forward for such a length of time now that Bob felt sure they must be getting close to the little cove mentioned by the captain. Presently a few cautious words from the keeper announced this fact. Then they would soon know whether or not this was to be the identical spot selected by the supposed smugglers as their best landing place.

"He's stopped!" the keeper was heard to mutter a few minutes later; "yes, and by hokey, it's right there alongside my cove! Reckon as how I hit the mark that time. We'll creep a bit nearer, and just wait till somethin' happens."

When the keeper fancied that they had drawn in as close as seemed advisable he called a halt by giving a chirp, very like the sound of a cricket, which had been agreed on as a signal.

There they crouched, and waited as patiently as they could, though doubtless each of the five must be burning with eagerness and anxiety all the while.

"He's signalling with his torch!" Bob told himself, after a while, when he detected a number of

flashes that were apparently sent out in the direction of the open sea.

That gave him an idea he might, if he watched closely, discover some answering ray out there in the gloomy night, beyond where the little wavelets lapped the shore.

True enough, he had been looking only a few minutes when he did discover a sudden little flash that seemed to cut the gloom just as a miniature thread of lightning might. Only once it came, and then was seen no more; but that must have been sufficient for the watchful Lopez, since he no longer waved his light, but kept it steady, as though meaning it to be a guide to those intending to make their way to the land.

Half an hour more crept by, when he heard a sound out on the water that was very familiar.

"Droppin' anchor!" whispered Captain Lon in his ear, and this agreed exactly with what Bob had already decided.

Again a long wait followed. The light which Lopez held would never be seen to the South; he had undoubtedly taken care that it was fully screened by a rise in the ground, and the presence of some stunted beach bushes. Then again, the patrol would hardly be due at the end of their first beat by now; and even if so, their attention was always directed out to the East where the ocean lay, rather than along the shore.

Listening with bated breath, the coast-guards could presently catch the plain dip of oars, so familiar to their ears. A boat was evidently coming ashore, and heading to enter the very cove which Captain Lon had picked out as the scene of the smuggler's operations, once he learned that they were active around his section.

And now it was time for them to be creeping still closer, for they meant to be in a position to suddenly appear on the scene, and take the transgressors of the revenue law completely by surprise.

Voices also came to their ears, as those in the boat exchanged remarks in connection with the course they were taking through the weak-running surf, and toward the spot where that glow served as a guide.

Lopez had apparently gone down as close to the edge of the cove as he dared, and was beckoning them on with his light. It looked very much as though, keen rascal though he was, the Cuban had taken too much for granted when he believed they could successfully run a cargo ashore within these few miles of Wyamoke Life-saving Station, under the very eyes of the crew. Yet he had done it successfully during the summer months, when Captain Lon had been alone in the house on the beach.

Now the boat had drawn up on the shore. Bob plainly heard the men jumping overboard, one at least splashing in the water. Then came low words

and after that a steady movement, as though they were carrying burdens ashore, to place them in a certain spot, from which they could be later on taken to the other side of the beach island; to be loaded again in another boat on the sound, which would ferry the smuggled cigars to a depot the location of which was of course unknown to Bob and his coast-guard friends.

Once Bob saw Lopez and another man talking earnestly together; and as the light from the little torch continued to move hither and thither it chanced to disclose the face of the stranger.

"That must be Black Carlos himself, because he's sure got the darkest face of any one I ever saw," Bob told himself, when this came to pass.

It was an open question with Captain Lon whether he should give the word that would precipitate trouble before the boat put off, or wait to see whether there was another cargo coming ashore. As it was the smugglers they wanted, rather than the contraband goods, he concluded that it would be folly to wait, and thus run the chance of losing most of the law-breakers.

But the problem was solved for him. From their hiding place Bob and the other coast-guards heard one of the smugglers ask in a cautious voice:

"Any more?"

"No, it's all landed," was the answer.

Then came a moment of silence. Captain Lon had decided to act.

"Get ready, boys!" he whispered hoarsely to his men. "Leap out on th' rascals now, before they get a chance to take to the boats!"

Bob felt a wild thrill go through him as he heard these words, and his muscles stiffened for the leap forward.

"All ready now!" cried Captain Lon, as he gave a spring from his hiding place. Bob was at his side on the instant, and the other coast-guards followed.

"Surrender!" cried Captain Lon.

"We've got you surrounded!" yelled Bob, more for the effect than because it was strictly true.

For an instant the smugglers hesitated, so surprised were they at the sudden rush of their would-be captors. Bob jumped close to one, and flashed his light in the fellow's face.

"*Carramba!*" muttered the man, and Bob saw that he was close to Lopez himself.

"I've got you!" cried Bob, wild with the desire to get this man, of whom his uncle had told him.

"Ah! You speak too fast, my friend!" returned the Spaniard, and, turning like a flash, he eluded Bob's eager hands.

"Fly! To the boats!" cried Lopez.

"Stand and fight! We outnumber them!" shouted one of the smugglers.

"No, fly! We can settle with them later!" urged

Lopez, and, as he spoke, Bob saw another man leap out of the darkness to the side of the man with the glass eye. In the light of his torch the boy saw that this was surely none other than Black Carlos himself.

"Oh, if we could only get them both!" thought Bob.

The scene was now one of wild confusion. The smugglers were trying to reach their boat and escape, and Captain Lon, and his men, including Bob, were endeavoring to prevent them.

Bob saw a figure pass close to him, and made a grab for it. In an instant a fist shot out and he was knocked down on the sand.

"Take that—pig!" he heard muttered in a foreign voice.

Bob was stunned for a moment, but was soon on his feet again, running after the retreating smugglers. He saw his mates engaged in a struggle with some of them and rushed up to help them.

"At 'em, boys!" cried Captain Lon. "Don't let 'em get away."

"Push off! Push off!" shouted a voice that Bob thought was Black Carlos's.

The boy made another grab for a dusky figure, only to have it wriggle from him like an eel, while he himself spun around like a top.

"I've got one!" shouted a guard.

"Hold on to him!" cried the captain.

There was the sound of blows, some grunts and exclamations, and the guard wailed.

"He got away again!"

"Take after him!" cried the captain. "Get 'em all!"

Desperately Bob made a leap forward, aiming to get Lopez, whom he could now see. But before he could do this some one hit him such a blow that he toppled over, and for a moment his senses left him. The last thing he remembered seeing, while pressing his electric torch as he fell, was Captain Lon closing in on Lopez, with Black Carlos trying to drag his partner away to the waiting boat.

Dimly Bob heard shouts, cries and calls for aid. He struggled to his feet, and staggered to the edge of the surf. He dashed some of the cold water in his face, and his reeling senses came back.

Then he saw two figures struggling close to him. One seemed to be trying to reach a boat, and the other was clinging to the struggling one.

"Somebody give me a hand!" cried Captain Lon, and Bob, with a fierce shout, threw himself on the smuggler. Together he and the captain bore him back from the boat and up the beach.

"Come on, Lopez!" pleaded Black Carlos.

"I cannot! They have me!" was the gurgling response of the captured smuggler, as Captain Lon's fingers closed on his throat, while Bob, seeing a

knife flash, knocked it spinning into the surf with a blow from his electric torch.

Then came more cries, the sound of waves slapping the sides of a boat, and the fight was over.

"There they go!" cried one of the coast-guards.

"Shoot at 'em!" yelled another.

"No, don't!" cried Captain Lon. "We don't want to kill any of 'em," but he spoke too late, as one of the guards did fire. A cry answered him out of the darkness, but whether any one was hit or not they could not then learn.

"Come here!" commanded the captain. "We've got to tie this fellow up! We've caught one, at any rate!"

"Yes, you've got me!" hissed Jose Lopez, for it was he. "But you wouldn't have had me if that cub hadn't knocked away my knife!" and he fairly spat the words at Bob.

"Take it easy now," advised Captain Lon. "You won't make anything by calling hard names. Bring those ropes here, men, and then see what sort of a cargo we've got from them."

"Have the smugglers got away?" asked one of the guards.

"There they go—all but Senor Lopez," replied Bob, as he pointed to a dark mass on the heaving waves. It was the boat containing the escaping criminals.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FRIEND IN NEED

"WELL, Bob, how do you feel?"

"Oh, a little stiff, Captain, but that's all. Did you get battered around any?"

"Yes, I got a few clips on the head, but I'm used to that. I was afraid, when I saw you go down that time, that you'd been badly hurt."

"Oh, it takes more than that to knock me out," said Bob, with a grin.

"You took a chance, though," remarked Asa Barnes, "when you knocked that knife out of the paw of Lopez."

"It was the only thing to do," returned Bob, simply. "I thought he was going to use it on the captain."

"And so he might, Bob, so he might," was the reply of the chief life-saver. "I'm tremendously obliged to you. But we've got Senor Lopez where he won't do any more smugglin' right away."

"He's locked up then, is he?" asked Don Squeers.

"Locked up high and dry, and the cargo of smuggled stuff those fellows landed is all safe under

government control. It was a good night's work for Uncle Sam all right, and it was good work on the part of you fellows—Bob and the rest of you."

It was the day after the eventful night's struggle with the smugglers.

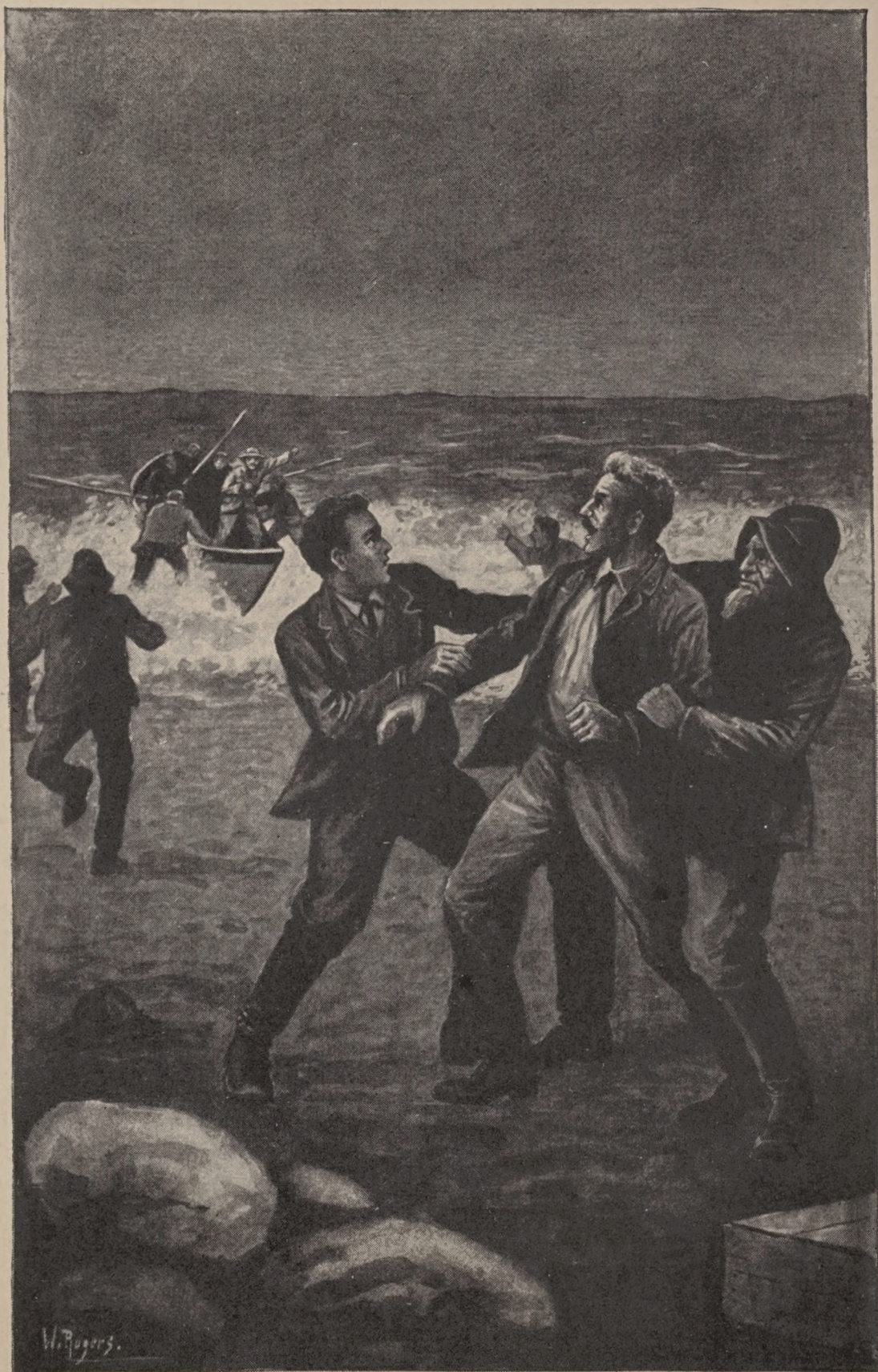
All save Lopez had escaped, and he had been caught and taken to jail to await trial. Though suffering from bruises, and a few cuts, neither Bob nor his friends were much hurt. After the morning duties Bob and some of the men had gone out to the small dock that jutted into the sound to try their luck at fishing.

Their attention, however, was divided between their lines and the evolutions of a motorboat that seemed to be trying to do some peculiar feats in water-work. The skipper of the craft seemed to be taking the most unnecessary risks.

"Look at that now, would you!" exclaimed Don, pointing to the boat, a little later.

"What do you s'pose he's up to?" asked Bob, curiously.

"I ben watchin' 'em kerry on," declared the surfer, sitting up straight now, "an' as nigh as I kin make out, they're doin' what they calls stunts. That's about the third time they run down at thet spile, an' jest grazin' it. Playin' conquer, they calls it, I reckon; but they better look out, or else if they go jest a leetle wrong it's goin' tuh be a head-on smash, an' good-bye tuh thet purty boat. Huh! thar



“Take it easy now,” advised Captain Lon.

they cum agin, sure's shootin', and a-headin' straight fo' the spile. Better git yuh coat off, Bob, an' be ready tuh swim; 'cause like as not yuh'll have tuh help pull two fools outen the water right soon."

Bob was of about the same opinion himself. He scrambled to his feet, and even as he started to jerk his jacket off, shouted a warning to the fellows who were laughing and shouting as they sent the little motorboat full tilt toward the dangerous spile that stood up in deep water about a hundred yards from the shore.

If their game was to see how close they could graze the pine pillar ambition must have dulled their sense of caution, for they chanced to get just a few inches nearer than they had expected would be the case.

Just as the surfman had prophesied, the side of the swiftly-moving launch crashed against the immovable spile; and the collision was such as to crush in the delicate planking as though it had been an egg-shell. Not only that but the wrecked boat was hurled away with such tremendous force that it immediately sent up a puff of flame and a cloud of smoke, showing that the gasoline tank must have been broken, allowing the dangerous fluid to come in contact with the fire.

Instantly Bob and the other life-saver sprang headlong into the water, only waiting long enough to kick off their boots. Unexpected as the call upon

their services had come, it found them fully prepared.

They swam out toward the scene of the disaster as swiftly as though they were racing for a splendid prize; and so in truth they were, for very likely a human life might be in deadly peril, which could only be saved through their prompt efforts.

Through the splashing drops that were the result of his overhand swimming, Bob could catch an occasional glimpse of the scene of the wreck. The launch was apparently all ablaze, and the two passengers must have jumped or been hurled into the sound, for there was a most terrific threshing going on close by, with half-choked cries for help.

Quickly the two life-savers got to the spot, though the time may have seemed ages to those who were in peril.

One of them could swim, though not accustomed to being in the water with his clothes on. He had pluckily seized upon his comrade, and was trying to hold him up, though the chances were that if left to themselves, both would have gone down in short order, as they were rapidly becoming exhausted when Bob and Don arrived on the scene.

There was burning lubricating oil on the surface of the water, which they had to avoid, for it would be a most unpleasant experience should they come in contact with this.

"Each take one, Don!" called out Bob, who

somehow seemed to naturally take it upon himself to give orders in this emergency.

Approaching on either side of the struggling boys Bob sternly told them to keep their wits about them, and they would have nothing to fear.

"Don't try to grab us around the neck or you'll get hurt!" he went on to caution them, knowing what frantic people, believing they are drowning, are likely in nearly every case to attempt.

Experience counts for considerable in the case of rescuing any one who is struggling in the water. That is why life-savers on the bathing beaches at summer resorts are so uniformly successful when they start out to rescue one who has been taken with a cramp, or been carried off by the fierce undertow. They know just how to handle their charge, and watch out to see that the one in danger has no chance to seize upon them.

So Bob came up behind the boy whom he saw could not swim, and suddenly taking hold of him, shouted to the other to let loose. As Don at about the same instant caught the second lad in a secure grip, the situation looked promising.

Toward the shore Bob started. He had to watch very carefully, not only to keep the other from twisting around in his grip, and catching even a slight hold on his person; but to also keep the boy's head well up, so as to prevent him from swallowing more water.

Before he could reach the shore he found that he had a dead weight on his hands; for the boy had lost consciousness. After that Bob could take him on his chest, and swimming on his back, keep him partly out of the water.

As soon as he landed he started to get the water out of the lad's lungs. Laying him face downward, with both arms extended above his head, he knelt over his body and commenced a regular movement, pressing down hard on a certain part of the small of his back, and then allowing the boy's lungs to draw in air again.

This movement, which is the most particular one in the whole process of restoring a partially-drowned person to consciousness, he repeated a good many times, not at all discouraged because success did not come immediately; for often it takes more than half an hour of vigorous artificial breathing to start the organs to once more assuming their normal functions.

Don had meanwhile come ashore with the other boy, who had tried to play the part of hero, after his foolish prank had nearly cost the life of his friend. The big surfman understood full well how to go about restoring respiration, for it was a part of his education in the service of Uncle Sam to know how to save such castaways as misfortune should wash up on the beach after a wreck, where life had not fully departed.

But after he had watched Bob work for several minutes he realized that he could not show that boy anything along these lines; and Don was quite content to crouch there at the side of the senseless lad, working his arms, or else chafing his legs in the effort to revive circulation.

Then finally success came, and the boy opened his eyes. Half an hour later he was able to walk; and alongside of a fire both dried their clothes. Apparently their spirits had sunk to low tide, and they were greatly subdued by this time. Both shook hands with their rescuers when a chance came to cross over to the mainland with a party of men who were giving up hopes of securing any more wreckage.

They had given their names as Paul Hedges and Larry Speedmore. Bob understood that the Hedgeses were wealthy Baltimore people who had a summer home some ten miles up the sound; and expected that when the boys mustered up enough courage to confess what had happened to destroy their pretty little launch, as likely as not there would come a letter from Paul's father.

This really happened several days later, and in the letter, besides the earnest thanks of the gentleman, was a check for two hundred dollars, which he hoped they would accept with his compliments as a slight token of his gratitude.

But the rules of the United States Government

are very strict on that score, and no life-saver is allowed to accept a reward for doing his duty; and while Bob had delightful visions of what he could do with his share of that money, in the way of having his father find and purchase a watch as near like the lost one as was possible, he made no comment when Captain Lon asked him to write to Mr. Hedges, explaining the circumstances, and returning the check.

CHAPTER XXIV

A LETTER FROM HOME

"A LETTER for you, Bob!"

"Glad to hear it, Captain Lon," replied the young life-saver, as he received his share of the mail, as he recognized his mother's well-known handwriting on the envelope. "Any news of Lopez?" for Captain Lon had been to the town hall to inquire as to the disposition of the prisoner.

"No, not much news," the captain answered. "He's still locked up, and by to-morrow a United State's marshal'll be on hand to take him away."

"And how about the cargo of cigars?" Bob continued, though fairly wild to get off by himself, and see what was in his precious letter.

"Oh! they'll take care that Wyamoke Station gets all the credit for making the seizure," Captain Lon continued, with an intake of breath that showed how well satisfied he felt over the affair that would continue to keep the little coast hamlet "on the map," so to speak. "And we all say it's owing to you knowing about Jose Lopez being a smuggler that we got the chance. Only for that they'd 'a' landed their cargo, and nobody been the wiser."

"I was in great luck there," said Bob, modestly.

"Huh! seems to me it was the rest of us that must have been in the biggest luck, just to have you drop in here on us; which we'll never deny," added the keeper, significantly, as he gave Bob a fond look, and then walked toward the station.

Bob, being left alone where he had awaited the landing of his three comrades, proceeded to read his letter. First he held it up, and looked at the inscription, traced by his mother's dear hand. Then, after a quick glance around, to make sure that he was not observed, he hastily pressed the envelope she had handled to his lips; and after that he carefully opened one end.

As he did so he was conscious of that same old tremor, for like a knife cutting into the sensitive flesh came the thought of the lost watch.

Surely, Bob reflected, she would say something about it in this, her second letter. Perhaps after her gentle way mother would just hint to him that in his present rough employment possibly a dainty lady's watch was hardly the proper thing for him to carry around; and that if he would send it back she would take infinite pleasure in mailing him one of those dollar timepieces that were much better suited for one who might be overboard frequently.

That would be just like mother, who always endeavored to make things as easy for others as she could, and would not give pain for worlds. But to

his utter astonishment, after Bob had greedily devoured the long letter from beginning to end, he did not find the slightest mention of the lost watch.

It puzzled him greatly, and made him wince at the same time. Surely mother must have missed her watch by now; and must remember how Bob had borrowed it just to carry to the barn dance. Yet the letter was only brimming over with the news of the neighborhood, and permeated by a parent's fond love.

She told him how she had eagerly read all about the storm, and the gallant work of the famous Wyamoke life-saving crew. Yes, and it made Bob turn red with pleasure to learn that they had even read of how he, Bob Spencer, had jumped into the sea to save that wretched sailor who struck the boat, and would otherwise have been lost. What a delicious thrill it gave him to know that father, mother and his four brothers had read all about that episode, which he had intended so carefully to avoid mentioning.

Afternoon was nearly over, since it had taken a long time for those who had gone across to the mainland to settle everything connected with the prisoner, as well as the seizure of contraband cigars that were to be delivered unbroken to the agent of the Government when he arrived on the morrow.

Captain Lon had been in communciation with Washington, and one of the first pleasant fruits of

the recent haul had been hearty congratulations from the Chief of the Department over his work; and that repaid the sturdy coast-guard for all his labors of the preceding night.

These men who stand ready to take their lives in their hands and risk everything they have in order to save strangers who are in deadly peril, receive far less credit than they really deserve.

Debarred from accepting any reward from others, and allowed only scant privileges with regard to visiting their families while they are on duty during the stormy part of the year, they lead a monotonous existence, enlivened by few pleasures.

It is little wonder then that they even welcome the coming of an occasional tempest, for at least that promises to arouse them from the dreary every day monotony and to bring new elements into their dull lives.

They are like the fireman who dozes in his chair during the daytime; but let the first stroke of the bell sound, and he is instantly another being, his drowsiness gone like a flash, and every nerve and muscle on the alert to do his duty. So the life-saver of the seaboard spends his time when a lull occurs in the storm period, and the weather persists in remaining mild and soft; but once let the wind arise, and the whitecaps sweep along on the tops of the giant waves, and there enters into his nature another spirit that fills him with enthusiasm over his chosen work

of fighting the wild sea for the lives that are in peril.

Bob stopped when close to the station, and watched the busy scene before him. Already he was beginning to feel a sort of affection for these rough fellows with whom his lot had been cast. He saw beneath the exterior, and knew that they possessed many excellent qualities. They could hardly fill the positions they did, and under a man like Captain Lon, without being the right sort of fellows.

Several among them had already become great friends with the newcomer, particularly Asa Barnes, Thad Wappinger and Don Squeers.

Then there was Ezra Carpenter who fairly worshiped the captain, and followed him around like a shadow, ready to do anything to serve him. Once, long ago the keeper of Wyamoke Life-saving Station had been instrumental in causing Ezra to reform, after he had been known as the village drunkard; and then getting him a place in the service, partly to keep him away from his evil associates until he could become strong enough to fight his own battles. For that Ezra felt that he owed all he had to Captain Lon; he now supported his little family in comfort, and his youngest boy rejoiced in the name of Lon, after the keeper.

Bob watched them moving around, some getting wood ready for cooking the evening meal; others were sky-larking, as even grown men will

sometimes do when off by themselves; while a couple seemed to be writing letters.

Unable to stand the strain any longer Bob had determined to write the whole humiliating truth to his mother, and get the load off his mind. He felt that it was a duty he owed her, that could not be put off any longer. Dave might have meanwhile found the watch, and somehow all the while the boy kept that hope in his heart. But whether this came about or not, he wanted to assure his mother that he meant to see that her loss was made good, as far as was possible.

And so for half an hour Bob wrote steadily, using the fountain pen which had been a parting gift from his father before he left home. He went into full particulars, so that the home folks might not think it had been so much his fault that the little watch was lost on that night, when he had been attacked in such a cowardly fashion by those three fellows.

Perhaps his mother would do as he asked her, and see Susie Bodkins, who could explain the circumstances in a way that would not do his reputation any hurt. And when she spoke to Dave, as he also asked her to, about the lost watch, he would tell her how Bob had almost immediately written to him about it soon after reaching his station on the coast, though at the time asking him to keep his secret.

After performing this duty, which he feared he had neglected too long already, Bob went out, thinking that he might see some one of the villagers heading across to the sound, who would be glad to drop his letter into the post-office over at Wyamoke that afternoon, so it would catch the night train that went North.

Discovering a boy with whom he had been talking that very afternoon, and whose name was Caleb Calkins, who was carrying some of the stuff he had collected over to a crazy looking boat he owned, Bob hailed him.

"Can you do a little errand for me after you get ashore, Caleb?" he asked, as he held up a dime, together with his precious letter.

"Sure I kin, if it's drop that letter in the office," replied the other, readily, for money was a scarce commodity in his house just then, and a dime looked in his eyes "as large as a cart wheel."

"And you won't forget to put it in as soon as you get ashore, will you?" Bob went on to say; "because it's a *very* important letter, you see, and I'd hate to have it miss connection with that mail train that goes up about nine to-night."

"Oh! I'll look out for thet, mister," replied the beach boy, confidently.

So Bob handed over his letter, together with the money; and as he stood there, and waved a hand after the boy, who had started to cross the wide but

shallow sound in his ramshackle boat, with a tattered sail that threatened to split in the strong wind that was blowing, the young life-saver fondly believed that since he had now sent the full particulars to his mother, he need no longer feel the reproach that had been shaming him so long.

But Bob, though he did not know it at the time, was very much mistaken when he thus believed that the clouds had all been brushed aside by his writing about the lost watch to his mother, for that letter never reached its destination.

The sailors, as well as the captain of the ill-fated bark *Glendora*, had left the shore, and gone to Baltimore to report at the office of the firm owning the wrecked vessel. Even the poor fellow whom Bob had jumped in after had recovered sufficiently from his injury to depart with his comrades.

But before leaving Wyamoke the skipper had caused a notice to be posted at the mail delivery window, requesting those salvage men who picked up anything that seemed valuable on the beach, to hold the same until an agent of the line could arrive, who would be glad to make satisfactory arrangements and pay a suitable sum for the property that had been saved from the sea.

There is a law upon this subject, and where the cargo of a wrecked vessel is of a nature worth buying back, a certain value is placed upon such portions

that have been "salvaged," and the wreckers must accept that in lieu of maintaining possession.

In the main, however, they are allowed to retain all they save; and where money does enter into the transaction the beach combers usually get much more than the stuff could ever be worth to them.

When the call came for supper later on, the men gathered around the table; and as hungry fellows the food that covered the homely board appealed to their fancy much more than the daintiest spread might to the jaded appetites of fortune's favorites.

True, only a white oilcloth was to be seen in place of a fine table linen; but it was kept immaculately clean; and after all what man cares deep down in his heart about the garnishings, when he is fairly wild to begin an attack upon the food that appeals so strongly to his appetite?

So the days went on until Bob had been three weeks in his new calling. After that adventure with the smugglers, when the chief offender managed to escape, things had gone on smoothly and quietly at the life-saving station on Wyamoke beach. The September days wore on until the middle of the month passed, and then Bob began to notice a sense of uneasiness among his companions.

This he knew was caused by the fact that the stormy equinoctial period was now at hand, when they might reasonably look for the most violent disturbances of the whole year.

During all this time, while Bob received a letter every Tuesday from his mother, and heard also from Frank and Fred, not a thing was said about the lost watch.

He did not know what to make of it, and began to wonder if after all his letter carrying that full confession had ever reached his mother at all. So he kept on the lookout, meaning the first time he saw that beach boy, Caleb, to take him to task and make him confess whether he had lost it or not.

One letter only had come from Dave in answer to that he had written, asking him to take up the search. In this the brother admitted that his own affairs as connected with his chances of entering the Secret Service with Uncle Dave had taken up so much of his attention lately that he had not been able to give much time to searching for the watch.

Still he had gone over the ground twice, and planned to make another try just as soon as the wet spell they were having had passed by. He meant to use that rake this time and would let Bob know what luck he had.

So Bob had to rest content and keep hoping for the good news to come.

On this particular day Captain Lon had himself been ashore, and came out late in the afternoon. Bob fancied he looked troubled as he walked across the sand dunes to the strongly built life-saving station.

It was when they had fairly well concluded their supper that Captain Lon sprung a little bombshell in the camp, so to speak. Bob had seen him look around at his crew several times in a peculiar way, and even noted the fact that there was what seemed to be a line of anxiety upon the keeper's genial face. And so he was not very much surprised at what came to pass.

"Well, lads," said the keeper, during a lull in the lively talk that had been going around, "I might as well tell you now as later that you'd better make up your minds to trouble. When I was ashore I had a wire from headquarters, warning me to keep an extra bright lookout, because the worst hurricane in ten years has left Cuban waters, curved around the end of Florida past Key West, and started up the Atlantic coast at a hundred mile an hour whirl. And chances are she'll hit along this section some time to-morrow, when there'll be Ned to pay. They're warning vessels everywhere to hug the harbors; but all the same chances are we'll have one or more strike on the sands out yonder before forty-eight hours. So get what sleep you can when you're off duty this night, because there's no telling when you'll have a chance to take it easy again!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE WEATHER BUREAU'S WARNING

THE men simply looked at one another when they heard this startling news. There was very little comment on the subject, only a tightening of the lips in a few cases; yet possibly it must have occurred to more than one mind to wonder whether it might not be this coming storm that was fated to make a vacancy in a certain little home over across the wide sound in the hamlet where the white cottages nestled.

After a little while they started to discuss other periods in the history of Wyamoke Life-saving Station; and express a curiosity as to whether this storm, that Captain Lon said was heralded as the worst the coast had known for ten years, could possibly exceed in violence that terror they remembered so well, which had ravaged the seaboard just four years back.

Naturally the talk from that time on was all about past experiences; and Bob as he sat and eagerly listened heard many new and thrilling episodes brought to the surface.

The night was apparently peaceful enough, with the stars shining overhead; but to an experienced weather prophet, such as these men of the shore had become after long years of service, there was a hint of a change in the dim way these heavenly bodies hung aloft, and shed their light upon the sleeping world below.

Sitting there, after the lamps were lighted, Bob watched those who were preparing the evening meal, and smiled with the consciousness that after all his dream had come true. Sometimes he felt almost tempted to pinch himself, lest he wake up and find himself once more in his familiar bed at home, and this picture of the interior of the Wyamoke Life-saving Station vanish just as the mist does after the sun appears.

But looking around he saw the various tiers of sleeping bunks, as well as the big heating stove which would doubtless feel mighty comfortable through many a bleak wintry day, and wild stormy night, when the crew came in worn out with their labors, almost perishing with the bitter sleet that froze upon their clothing, and perhaps carrying those poor wretches whom they had snatched from the jaws of the cruel sea.

Every man had his own locker in this well-arranged station, where he could keep his personal belongings. There were blankets for all, and to spare, for Uncle Sam is generous with those who work in

his service, and year by year the great chain of life-saving stations along the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts, the Gulf of Mexico and the United States side of the Great Lakes is being extended and improved.

And as Bob watched the cheery scene he again and again assured himself that he was more than glad he had been so fortunate as to find a berth in such a well-ordered station as that under the charge of Captain Lon.

Storms would come, but that fact did not seem to dismay Bob in the least. He had already passed through one experience, and was ready to try it again whenever the necessity arose.

And this being the case, the new recruit felt no sinking in the region of his heart as he listened to the men relate all manner of thrilling episodes as they sat at the table, partaking of a warm and wholesome meal.

"The glass is going down slowly," one of the men announced, after supper, as the first watch prepared to issue forth to start upon their long tramp up and down the beach.

"Oh! I don't calculate that it'll show much change before morning," Captain Lon spoke up. "While the head of the hurricane is only a few hundred miles, so to speak, South of us right now, you know the whirling motion of these West Indian hurricanes is the worst thing about 'em. Sometimes

the storm itself hardly seems to leave a certain section for days, yet all that time it'll be roaring round and round at eighty, ninety, yes, even a full hundred miles an hour."

As before Bob was one of the first watch, and he had Thad again for company; but this was a far different night from the one when they had butted into that fierce head wind, with the rain pouring down in sheets, and the thunder and lightning adding to all the wild commotion.

Now they could chat more or less as they walked their round twice before the coming of midnight, when the second watch went on duty. And the new member of the crew learned still more interesting things connected with this business of saving vessels, or wrecked sailors, from the violence of the elements.

Bob was like a sponge when it came to soaking up information; and it seemed as though he could never get enough. As he had already become a universal favorite with the men, they were only too willing to tell him anything they knew, realizing at the same time that their stories of thrilling scenes would not cause him to weaken in his intention to follow this life.

They had seen him tested, and knew full well the kind of material that a Spencer was made of. Any fellow who could spring overboard into that boiling sea in order to save a poor mariner who had been

knocked senseless, and was being carried away by the receding billow, was worthy of a berth in even such a noted crew as that of Wyamoke Station.

When Bob once more reached the shelter house the stars were beginning to disappear overhead. So far as he could make out there did not seem to be any particular masses of clouds, as on that other occasion; but the stars had grown dim until by degrees they vanished entirely from sight in the thickening atmosphere that must be a forerunner of the coming hurricane.

It was unduly warm, too, for this is the customary precursor of one of those tropical disturbances that push some of the heat of the Antilles ahead of them when they start to make a record journey, either up the coast or into the Mexican Gulf.

When one of these hurricanes is reported in the Caribbean Sea it is carefully watched by the officers of the Weather Bureau in Washington, and its progress hourly and daily noted, being telegraphed to every point possible along both coasts.

No one can tell, up to a certain time, which of the two courses it will take; until it has advanced far enough to strike the tip of the Florida peninsula. Then it will either curve, and start up the Atlantic coast; or else continue advancing into the Gulf, and later on strike New Orleans and the coast of Texas.

Years ago when Galveston suffered so terribly it was one of these same hurricanes that have their

birth in the Islands of the Antilles that did all the damage. The same storm followed up the Mississippi Valley, turned across the Great Lakes and passing down the St. Lawrence River, caused a tremendous amount of damage off the New Foundland Banks, after which it even crossed to Europe and was heard from there.

Altogether that single storm was under observation fully three weeks; and as it covered a territory of hundreds of miles in width during its onward sweep, the chances are that its equal has never been known in America.

Before seeking his bunk Bob consulted the barometer which they owned at Wyamoke Station, and which had often been of great value in warning the life-savers that a period of storm and stress was coming down upon them.

"Still dropping, eh, lad?" asked Captain Lon, thrusting his head out from his bunk nearby.

"Yes, it is below the reading of the last storm, which was twenty-eight-and-a-half," was Bob's reply; for he was greatly interested in this valuable little instrument, whereby men had found a way to train the mercury to serve them as a guardian angel.

"And by morning it'll be lower than twenty-eight, if what they wired me is half true," grunted the keeper, once more vanishing to get what sleep he could.

That was not very delightful news, and natur-

ally Bob lay there for some time trying to picture what might come out of this new tempest. He hoped that no vessel would be so unfortunate as to strike the treacherous shoals off Wyamoke shore, while it lasted.

Finally he fell asleep, and knew nothing more until he was awakened by the odor of coffee, and found that it was a dull, gray morning, with most of his mates stirring, because they knew that a time of action was close by.

Bob went outside to dash some cold water in his face, as was his custom the first thing after awakening. The air was heavy, and there seemed to be a strange moaning sound from somewhere far out at sea; as though the spirits of all those who had found a grave beneath those green waters might be mourning.

The young life-saver stood out on the beach and looked long and earnestly toward the South where the dull gray was most dense; but so far there seemed to be no sign of what lay hidden far below the horizon.

There was no sun visible that morning, though they could just manage to tell where the big orb must be, for there was a queer brassy hue that seemed particularly ominous.

"Feels like we was a-goin' tuh git her right smart along by noon," said a voice close to his elbow; and turning he found that Thad had followed

him out, possibly to also take his private observation as to the state of the weather.

"I don't ever remember feeling it just this way," Bob remarked. "But that might come from my having lived all my time in the interior, where we never have this damp feeling that comes from the sea. And say, Thad, what makes that creepy noise out yonder? Is that the way storms tell you they are in the road, so you can get things fastened up?"

"Sometimes they does, Bob, but not often," came the reply. "Fact is, I reckons it might be on'y the wust kind as acts thetaways. Allers makes me feel bad too, tho' I don't know why it should, 'case I hain't given tuh anything like thet, leavin' the same tuh the wimmen folks."

"And you think we'll be having something doing by noon, do you?" continued Bob.

"I does thet, an' mebbe befo', if the wind rises, as she's apt tuh do any ole time," the experienced life-saver assured him.

The call to breakfast interrupted their little talk. And as might be expected, while the morning meal progressed about everything that was said had more or less connection with the trying experience that was probably before them.

No sooner was the meal finished than the wise keeper had all hands set to work doing various things. Two of the best cooks were detailed to get food prepared, so that if they were too busily em-

ployed for the next forty-eight hours to devote any time to this, at least there would be no necessity for the life-savers to go hungry. A fire could be kept going much of the time, so that hot coffee was to be had, with which to refresh the weary workers, wet and bedraggled as they were apt to find themselves; or else to help restore any unfortunate whom they managed to rescue from the sea's fury.

As for himself, assisted by Bob and several others, the keeper set on his rounds to personally inspect every bit of paraphernalia connected with the business of the life-saving station.

Each boat was closely looked over, and if anything could be done to improve its condition men were immediately set to work with that idea in view. Then came another overhauling of the tackle connected with the beach gun, and the breeches buoy—whip, blocks, hawser, and the queer receptacle for the imperilled mariner to thrust both legs through, while he was hauled ashore through the boiling surf, were most critically examined in detail.

Then came the short little cannon itself, from which was to be fired the shot that would carry the rapidly uncoiling line straight over the wreck, so that those still aboard could seize hold, and haul, first the whip and block, aboard, and later on the hawser upon which the buoy was to be drawn back and forth by means of the whip.

Of course these were always kept in what the men called "apple pie order;" but that made no difference with Captain Lon; something might have occurred since he had last looked them over to cause a strand to weaken, or a bit of iron to rust, so that it was liable to give way. His principle seemed to be that a chain can only prove as strong as the weakest link in it; and he was therefore always searching for that same unfortunate link.

The morning passed slowly away.

Thad proved to be a good prophet, for along about ten o'clock the wind arose, and rapidly grew in volume. At noon it was blowing great guns out of the southeast, and increasing with every hour. Already the ocean looked as angry as Bob had ever seen it; and the captain assured him that it promised to keep on growing more and more furious as the day advanced, until by night it would be something terrible indeed.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE COMING OF THE HURRICANE

"BAROMETER is still going down," remarked Bob, as he came back from one of several inspecting trips to where the instrument hung on the wall.

"That's what it is, lad," agreed Captain Lon, "and I hope it stops before the mercury gets to the end of the tube. Though I don't know's it can be much worse!"

"Listen to that, will you!" exclaimed one of the men, as a blast fairly shook the station.

"Yes, and the tide's coming up fast, too," added another, who had just come in.

"There don't seem to be many folks from the mainland out now," observed Bob, as the day was drawing to a close.

"No, they've sense enough to stay in out of the storm," observed Captain Lon. "It's only sailors, and chaps like us, that have to be out whether they like it or not. Not that I'm kicking," he added quickly, "for I like it, on the whole. But I'm thinking we'll have our work cut out for us this night! See to it, boys, that you've got everything

you need, and in readiness, before it gets dark," and with this warning Bob and the others looked to their outfits.

The patrol was kept up just the same as at night during ordinary occasions, as far as human nature could stand it. Of course the captain was shrewd enough not to press too heavily on the endurance of his men; for should a wreck come ashore they must be in condition to work for hours, deluged with the rain, and hardly able to stand up before the blasts of wind.

The day came to an end without anything happening to cause alarm. So far as it was known no vessel had been blown in on those fatal shoals, where many a gallant bark had "left her bones in the graveyard," as the life-savers were wont to put it.

And now came the most dreadful night Bob had ever known in all his experience. Thad had spoken truly when declaring that the other gale had not been "a circumstance" to this one.

The sky was inky black, and all around them sounded the roar of pounding waves and shrieking wind. Looking out to sea, they could see nothing but a tumbling riot of white-capped waves, that seemed to be chasing after each other like race-horses competing for a prize.

The usual conditions were altered by the coming of the storm, so that only a portion of the crew sat

down at a time to eat; and even then they were in momentary expectation of being called forth to either man the lifeboat, or get the beach gun into service.

Everyone's nerves seemed strained to the utmost tension, and it would be next to a miracle if any member of that little group managed to catch a wink of sleep during that first night of the hurricane.

When they were not outside making short excursions up and down the beach, exposed to the cruel weather, the men were trying to recuperate. Of course there could not be such a thing as a two-mile stretch to each man while conditions remained at this stage; but they must be content to simply keep as bright a lookout seaward as possible, and leave the rest until morning.

Occasionally the captain would give orders to ignite one of the Coston lights. He had a faint hope that were this seen by the lookout aboard some vessel that was being carried into danger, it might still allow of time for them to haul off, and keep from striking on the fatal shoals.

Bob would never forget that night, it was impressed so indelibly on his mind. He may have thought he had experienced furious gales before, while out camping, or on a Fall hunt with some of his boy chums; but this was really much more terrible than all those others rolled into one; so he told

himself as he struggled to keep from being actually picked up by the wind, and carried away across the strip of sand which served as a barrier to the ocean's billows.

In several places both above and below, the captain declared he believed that the tide rose so high that many of the largest of these waves must actually sweep up over the sand dunes, and a part of their energy pass on to the sound. This same thing had occurred only twice before in all his experience of thirty-odd years; so that Bob was able to judge what sort of a storm this must be to equal that long past record.

It was somewhere near dawn, though the darkness held as densely as ever over all that scene, when one of the men who chanced to be on duty at the time came reeling into the station, almost exhausted.

They could see from his manner that he had news of some kind to tell; but first of all must be allowed some time to catch his breath, and restore his energies.

Captain Lon hastened to get him a cup of hot coffee; while others stirred up the fire and rubbed his cold hands. After a short time the man, who was Ben Whitlatch, made signs that he felt better, and wanted to speak.

"Is it a wreck?" demanded Captain Lon, knowing just how the other felt in his exhausted condi-

tion, and that the quickest way to cut the Gordian knot was to ask questions that could, if necessary, be answered with a nod of the head.

"Yes," Ben managed to say, swallowing hard.

"Which way—up or down?" asked the keeper of the station, and not without considerable anxiety, because a great deal depended on the answer; since the shoals lying above were considered the easiest to cheat of their intended prey; while few vessels that went on to the South ever survived the experience.

Then again the peril was always greater to the life-savers below the station, and nine-tenths of their mishaps had occurred in that quarter.

"South!" came the answer, as Ben began to find his breath again, the hot coffee no doubt assisting in this work of recovery. "We didn't see a sign of her till that one light flashed up, and it told us she was hard and fast on the sands about in the same place where the *Nancy Sloan* struck, four years ago."

"That's bad news, mate," said Captain Lon; for memory immediately carried him back to the wreck of that unfortunate vessel, when there were many of her crew washed overboard before the breeches buoy could be sent out to try and save the few survivors; this after the lifeboat had been hurled ashore five separate times when the valiant crew tried to launch it.

"We kinder think she might be a steamer, Cap," the surfman went on to say.

"Why so?" demanded the other, with a look of concern; because that might mean there were women and children in danger; whereas with a schooner it only stood for the crew of a few sailors at most.

"Now and then, when the openin' came along we could see a green light that looked like it was high up on a stay," Ben continued.

"Mebbe one of the coasters that was caught out, trying to make her port to the South," said one of the others.

Captain Lon shook his head in the negative.

"I hardly think it would come that way, men," he declared. "Because you see the warning was out long enough ahead to keep any captain from taking chances, if so be he was headin' South."

"Then what would you say she is?" asked Bob.

"Just as like as not one of them fruit steamers comin' up from the West Indies," replied the keeper.

"In some fashion she must have slipped on ahead of the hurricane, while it was makin' up its mind whether to hit along this coast, or else run into the Gulf beyond Key West; but it caught up with her, seems, and now there's a-goin' to be another story of the Wyamoke shoals to be recorded in the books of the department at headquarters. Goodness knows they be plenty enough as it is, without any more. But no matter how they anchor a lightship out

there, to warn 'em off, and give her a siren foghorn to blow in thick weather, wrecks come along just the same, because captains will take chances."

Bob saw that the men did not make any effort looking to going out just then. He knew from this fact that the captain judged the storm to be too severe for anything to be attempted while the darkness of night remained.

No doubt in the morning the life-savers would get busy, and put in an arduous day; but after all they were only human, and nothing could live and work under cover of darkness, with that gale raging. Men must see in order to launch their surfboat in the face of a raging sea; or else try and send a line out over the wreck by means of the effective little beach gun.

"I suppose you've had steamers on the shoals before now, Captain?" asked Bob, always on the lookout for information.

"Well, yes, and a good number of 'em, at that, son," was the other's reply. "It was just last season that one of these same fruit boats came in during a bad fog, and got stuck on the North sands. They had to lighten her a heap before the tugs we telegraphed for could pull her off. And if the weather had changed while that was a-goin' on it'd been good-bye to the steamer. But she got away, with part of a load saved, and nobody hurt."

"And say, mebbe we didn't have bananas a-plenty,

that season!" chuckled Ezra Carpenter. "The bunches was knee-deep all along the beach, green as grass, too; but we took 'em in, and it was a mighty poor house in Wyamoke that couldn't boast o' harf a dozen bunches ripenin' for weeks to come. Reckon we had 'em every which way, cooked and raw. I just used to dream o' big tarantulas a-creepin' out of the bunches we had tied up here."

"But the steamer is made of iron or steel, and perhaps she might stand all that pounding?" suggested Bob.

Again the captain shook his head, this time in the negative.

"They ain't never a boat made that's strong enough to stand up agin that sea for many hours, believe me, lad," he said, soberly. "Ye ain't got an idea what terrible force they be back o' that hammering. When the ship is afloat it gives 'way, like; but let her lie on a reef, or the shifting sands, and it's only a question of time when she'll buckle, and break in two, steel or not. But I'm hoping this one is staunch enough to hold out till we get a chance to work the breeches buoy."

"Then you think that you'll have to use the beach gun after all, Captain?" Bob continued; while his eye lighted up eagerly; for he realized that the occasion he had been so anxiously looking forward to was now near at hand.

"They ain't no other way," the keeper observed,

drily. "No boat'd live in that sea, even if we could launch one, which I take it there ain't a life-savin' crew along the whole coast could do better than my men. But we can work the other game all right, if so be the wreck ain't too far out. If that happens to be the case all I got to say about it is, Heaven help them as are aboard her!"

As the light grew steadily stronger, though nothing to boast of at the best, Bob saw that the entire crew had commenced to make ready to go out into the storm.

CHAPTER XXVII

FIRING THE WRECK-GUN

“LIVELY now, boys!” cried Captain Lon, and his tones were sharp and crisp, like the crack of a whip. “Lively, every one of you! There’s hard work ahead of us!”

Bob and the others were ready on the instant. Oil-skins were donned, rubber boots pulled well up on sturdy thighs, and the yellow hats tied beneath the chin, that they might not blow away.

“Out with the gun!” ordered the captain. “Take along a couple of extra shot, too. We may lose one!”

In the room adjoining the living apartment of the station was the beach cannon, with its apparatus. On a small two-wheeled cart, with broad tires so that it would not sink in the sand, was carried the gun, the hawsers, cables, the shot and the big shears, or wooden upright, on which the rope is raised high enough to take it above the waves.

In almost less time than it takes to tell it the life-savers were on their way up the beach, keeping as

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much as possible on the firm sand, and dragging their apparatus with them.

"Let us know when we get to where you saw the light, Ben!" called the captain.

"Aye, aye, sir!" was the answer.

They worked their way along through the storm for half a mile more, and then Ben shouted:

"About here, Cap!"

"All right. Get ready, men! Can any of you sight her?"

They all peered through the mist and flying spray.

"I think she's there," said Bob. "I can see a black spot out there."

"That's her, likely. Now if we can only get a line to her! Lively, men!"

Quickly the men took their appointed stations. Two of them dug a great pit in the sand. This was where the anchor would be buried to hold the shore end of the heavy hawser, once it had been pulled aboard the vessel and made fast.

Captain Lon himself saw to the loading of the gun. Into the yawning muzzle of the short, squat little mortar he dropped the red flannel bag of powder.

"I'm going to give her a double charge!" he cried.

"Look out you don't tear the shot off the line!" cautioned one of the men.

"We've got to take that risk," was the answer. "She'll need a double load to carry agin' this wind."

Once the powder was in, there was put on top of it the long, cylindrical piece of iron, or shot, to the outer end of which was fastened a long, thin, but very strong line. It was this line it was hoped to shoot out to the ship, and by means of it the heavier cable could be hauled aboard.

Beside the cannon, on the sand, was a box containing this line, and it was coiled in a peculiar manner so that it would not foul when payed rapidly out by the hurtling shot.

"Got that anchor buried?" cried the captain, sharply

"Almost," was the answer.

"Some of you lend a hand!" commanded the chief. "We're losing time."

Many shovels soon piled enough sand on the shore anchor to hold it against the weight of those whom it was hoped to save. Then with the shears in readiness to raise the hawser above the tossing waves, the captain made ready to fire.

He sighted the mortar as well as he could in the semi-darkness. Then, through the touchhole he ran the steel that punctured the power bag, and let the grains flow out in readiness for the primer. The primer, or what corresponded to the percussion cap, was adjusted, and the captain took hold of the string.

"All ready!" he called.

"All ready!" answered his men.

There was a little snapping sound as the primer went off, followed by a dull boom as the charge in the mortar exploded.

Then Bob saw the weight shoot out, carrying the line with it.

Would it reach the vessel?

A groan from Captain Lon answered Bob.

"She fell short!" said the commander. "Haul her back, boys! We'll try again. More powder and more elevation!"

The line was hauled in, and then the wisdom of taking along extra shot was seen, for the first one had veered off in the sea.

Quickly the line was again coiled in its criss-cross fashion, while the mortar was loaded again, and the new weight or shot made fast.

Captain Lon changed the position of the cannon, at the same time elevating the muzzle to make it carry higher, and farther.

While the men stood expectantly about, he got out a larger bag of the powder, from the waterproof box. This was rammed home, and the shot dropped in on top of it. Again was the bag punctured, and the primer inserted.

"This is the time she goes!" cried the captain, grimly. It was getting a little lighter now, and he could see better.



Boom! The mortar bore its message of cheer to those
on the doomed vessel. [See page 257]

Boom!

The mortar bore its message of cheer to those on the doomed vessel.

Out shot the weight, and again the line was carried over the heaving waves. Out and out it spun from the box that held it until there was hardly any left.

"If that doesn't go—" said the captain, but it seemed to have reached the ship, which had been slung around until she lay almost broadside to the beach, making the attempt more easy.

Bob well knew what would now follow, in case the line had gone across. The sailors would haul until they had received the board on which were printed instructions in French and English. Of course these instructions are not always necessary, but the government was taking no chances. The directions read:

"Make the tail of the block fast to the lower mast, well up. If the masts are gone, then to the best place you can find. Cast off shot line, see that the rope in the block runs free, and show signal to the shore."

As soon as the signal is seen that this has been done a three-inch hawser is bent on to the whip, and hauled off to the vessel by the life-saving crew, possibly assisted by some of those on board, if the circumstances admit.

When the end of this reliable hawser is hauled in by those on the imperiled vessel, a tally-board will be found attached, bearing the following directions, also in both languages, one on the front and the other on the back:

“ Make this hawser fast about two feet above the tail block; see that all is clear, and the rope in the block runs free, and show signal to the shore.”

That was the next thought of all. Would the signal come from the vessel to show that the line had gone aboard?

Eagerly Bob looked at the slender line that meant so much to those in peril. It had ceased paying out now, and extended from its box, down the sands, and into the heaving waters.

There was a moment of intense anxiety.

Had they failed, only to try again?

CHAPTER XXVIII

A HERO OF THE STORM

"THAR'S the signal; they've got the line fast somehow!" shouted Thad Wappinger, close to Bob's ear.

The young life-saver guessed this much for himself, because he had been able to make out a single figure waving what appeared to be his hat around his head in a violent fashion, as though this might be the captain of the fruit steamer, and he knew what was expected of him.

Apparently Captain Lon had seen the same thing, only more distinctly, through his excellent marine glasses. At any rate his actions indicated as much; for turning to some of his men he shouted:

"Make sure the line is fast to the tail block of the whip, for they're ready to pull it aboard!"

"Aye, aye, Captain!" called back Charles Coon.

Quickly the line began to drag, as eager hands aboard the imperiled vessel tugged with might and main. The whip block was drawn into the raging sea, and continued to travel until it must have fallen

into the possession of those whom they hoped to save.

A few minutes elapsed, during which they were doubtless finding some convenient place where the whip block, and also the heavy hawser that was to follow, could be securely attached.

"There, he's at it again!" shouted one of the life-savers.

It was true that the man on board seemed to be signaling once more. This they understood to mean that, having the whip block fastened, they were now ready for the hawser, which Charles Coon had bound to the rope that passed freely through that same block, now far out on the stranded steamer.

The sturdy men on the beach hauled away, and the big hawser, on which so much depended, began to pass along. Perhaps some of the sailors aboard also lent a hand, as was only right, for it took considerable pulling to cause a three-inch rope to travel through the billows that fought it with such savage force.

Meanwhile, and with all their hard and frantic work—work that would mean the saving of precious human lives—the coast-guards cast anxious glances now and then out to where the craft lay—a sodden wreck, with the great seas breaking over her, and often hiding her from sight.

Bob, pausing a moment to get his breath, shielded

his eyes with his hands, to keep, if possible, the flying spray and spume out of them, and tried to peer and see if all was going as well as possible aboard the doomed craft.

"Can you see anything, Bob?" asked Asa Barnes, as he passed our hero.

"Not much, Asa, for a fact. It's pretty thick out there."

"Yes, lad, but not nigh as thick as though we had a fog. Ah, them are the times when it is hard—when you can't see two yards afore you, and you have to peer and peer until you feel your eyes straining out of your head. Thank fortune there's no fog to hamper us, whatever else there is!"

"But if there was a fog there wouldn't be any wind, Asa, and that would be a good thing. It's the wind now that's making the most of the trouble, kicking up such a sea."

"I know, lad. But we've worked in worse seas than this."

"Then you don't call this bad?" asked Bob in surprise, for just then there came a fiercer blast of the gale, and he had to bend his body to it, while his sou'wester, tied as it was under his chin, came close to being blown out into the heaving waves that rushed up the beach sand as though they would tear the shore bodily away and swallow it up.

"It may seem bad to you," went on Asa, "and I'm not sayin' but what it is bad, but you should see

some storms we have here! I remember once——”

But Asa's remembrance was interrupted by the hoarse voice of Captain Lon crying:

“Look lively lads! There's a kink in that hawser! Straighten it out quick, or the poor souls aboard will think we've deserted 'em when they find they can't help haul it aboard any longer.”

Bob and Asa jumped to aid. The wind had whipped a kink in the big rope, and that, with the shifting sand, had fouled it, so that it no longer paid out freely.

“Bear a hand!” bawled the captain. “It won't do to have this go wrong! Bear a hand—every man that can!”

Willingly and eagerly the brave life-savers jumped at the word of command. With skillful, if roughened, fingers the guards worked eagerly to straighten the rope. It had ceased to pay out, and those aboard the wreck no longer helped to pull on it to make it fast to the ship. Evidently they knew something was wrong.

“That's better!” cried Captain Lon, as the hawser was once more in readiness. “Now if they'll only pull.”

He ran down until he stood thigh-deep in the rough water, and shouted through his trumpeted hands:

“Pull! Pull! Ahoy aboard the wreck! Pull! She's all right now! *Pull for your lives!*”

It is doubtful if his voice carried half way to the stranded wreck, so powerful was the gale and so thunderous the pounding of the surf on the beach. Anxiously the men looked toward the ship.

The cable ran down the sand, and stretched out into the water, like some long, thin serpent.

All eyes were on this now, for on it depended the saving of those aboard the wreck.

"Is all clear, Charles?" cried Captain Lon to Charles Coon, who was looking over the apparatus to see if any more trouble was likely to arise.

"All clear! Aye, aye, sir!" Charles cried above the roar of the fierce storm.

"Then pull, men!" yelled the captain. "As soon as those on the wreck see the rope moving through the tail block, they'll know all is well again, and they'll help pull, too!"

Indeed, help was needed to get that rope—three inches in diameter—through the pounding seas. The waves caught and dragged at it as though they would tear it loose from the smaller rope to which it was fastened. Aye, even the tail block itself might be ripped from where it was made fast to part of the wreck. And should this happen it would mean that all the work of firing the mortar would have to be done over again.

But now matters seemed to be going better. The hawser paid out slowly, as those on the beach hauled

on the rope that was rove through the tail block, or pulley.

"Now she's all right!" cried Bob, joyfully.

"Yes, they're bearing a hand!" said Asa, who pulled beside Bob. "I can tell by the feel of it. They're helping, too!"

And indeed, aboard the wreck the brave men were doing all in their power to assist. As the life-savers pulled in unison, and stopped automatically to get a fresh pulling grip, they could feel, in the intervals, that another force was also hauling on the hawser.

"Watch out, some of you, to see that she doesn't foul again!" directed Captain Lon.

"Aye, aye, sir!" cried Ezra Carpenter. "She'll not kink again. She's mostly paid out!"

Even in all the wild excitement of the gale, and with his heart thumping like a hammer within his breast, from the exertion and the thought of what he was about to witness, Bob could not help thinking of a simple scene he had witnessed while on his way to become a life-saver.

This was the sight of a woman, in a tall tenement house near which his train had passed, hauling on a pulley clothes line, fast to a high pole in the yard. The clothes line was an endless one, and was rove through a pulley just like, only smaller, the tail block that had been sent off to the wreck. And indeed I can give you, who have never seen it, no

better idea of how the life-savers worked than to use the illustration of a woman pulling on an endless clothes line, running through a pulley. In such a manner, after the small line had been shot off to the ship, was the big hawser hauled aboard.

"Queer I should think of that now," mused Bob.

He paused for a breath, now and then, as did all of the men, only to work with fiercer energy when once more they bent their backs and stretched their arms to the labor of saving lives.

"She—she ought to be out there by this time!" panted Captain Lon, as he looked to see how much of the hawser remained on the beach. There was very little.

"Will it be long enough?" thought Bob, with sudden fear.

There were times when Bob seemed to feel his heart in his throat, for he was almost sure some accident had happened, and the hawser had worked free from its piloting rope.

But he took courage when he saw the sublime confidence exhibited by the captain and his right-hand man; for they knew that these slackenings were bound to occur, and had faith in the apparatus to meet the test to which it was being put.

In the end it turned out that they were right, for the captain, still using his glasses, called out that those on the steamer seemed to be lifting the end of the heavy hawser aboard.

"They've got it, lads, and now get ready to send the breeches buoy at the next signal;" he bawled, at the top of his voice.

Given a little time to make that hawser secure, just about two feet above where the tail block of the whip was fastened, and if no accidents happened, the breeches buoy would be quickly traveling out over this rope bridge, to take on its first passenger.

Bob was doing all he could to assist. He had pulled with his whole heart on the whip and the hawser; and now stood ready to help get the breeches buoy out to those who were in such sore need of assistance.

It seemed an eternity before the captain could make out that for the third time the man aboard was again waving his hat as a signal that the hawser had been made secure.

"Let her go, boys!" he cried, excitedly; and there was a hoarse cheer in reply; after which the life-saving appliance started to travel along the heavy rope, those in charge having tightened the same with the skill of men who had practiced this art over and over again, and knew just how to take in the slack; for the hawser must be kept as taut as possible, in order to prevent the passenger from sagging down into the waves too much, as he or she comes ashore.

Of course with such a low beach to work from,

it would be impossible to wholly prevent such a thing, as might have been the case could the life-savers have had a bluff from which to send out the buoy. But if the passenger had been properly secured there was little danger of an accident, when the waves leaped up and deluged the traveling buoy.

It was fortunate indeed that the atmosphere had cleared sufficiently by now for the keeper to see fairly well, because it was necessary that he keep in touch with all the movements of that man who was sending the signals; otherwise Bob and the other workers would not know when to pull so as to start the buoy ashore.

Evidently those aboard the steamer were in constant fear that the vessel must break in two under the pounding of those great seas. They worked with rapidity; and presently Captain Lon, springing to his men, seized hold of the line himself, shouting:

“Get this one ashore in a hurry, boys!”

They knew from the tone of his voice that he, too, had seen some signs that the steamer was going to break before long. His experienced eye had been examining her condition, and no doubt he had detected a certain movement with every sweep of a billow that gave him grave fears.

“There she comes!”

“Yes, there’s the buoy!”

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“Haul in quick now, men! Steady all! Give way there!”

Thus came the eager cries as Bob and the others worked frantically to save the first life from the wreck.

“It’s a woman!” someone gasped.

“And a baby with her!” cried Bob. “Look—a baby!”

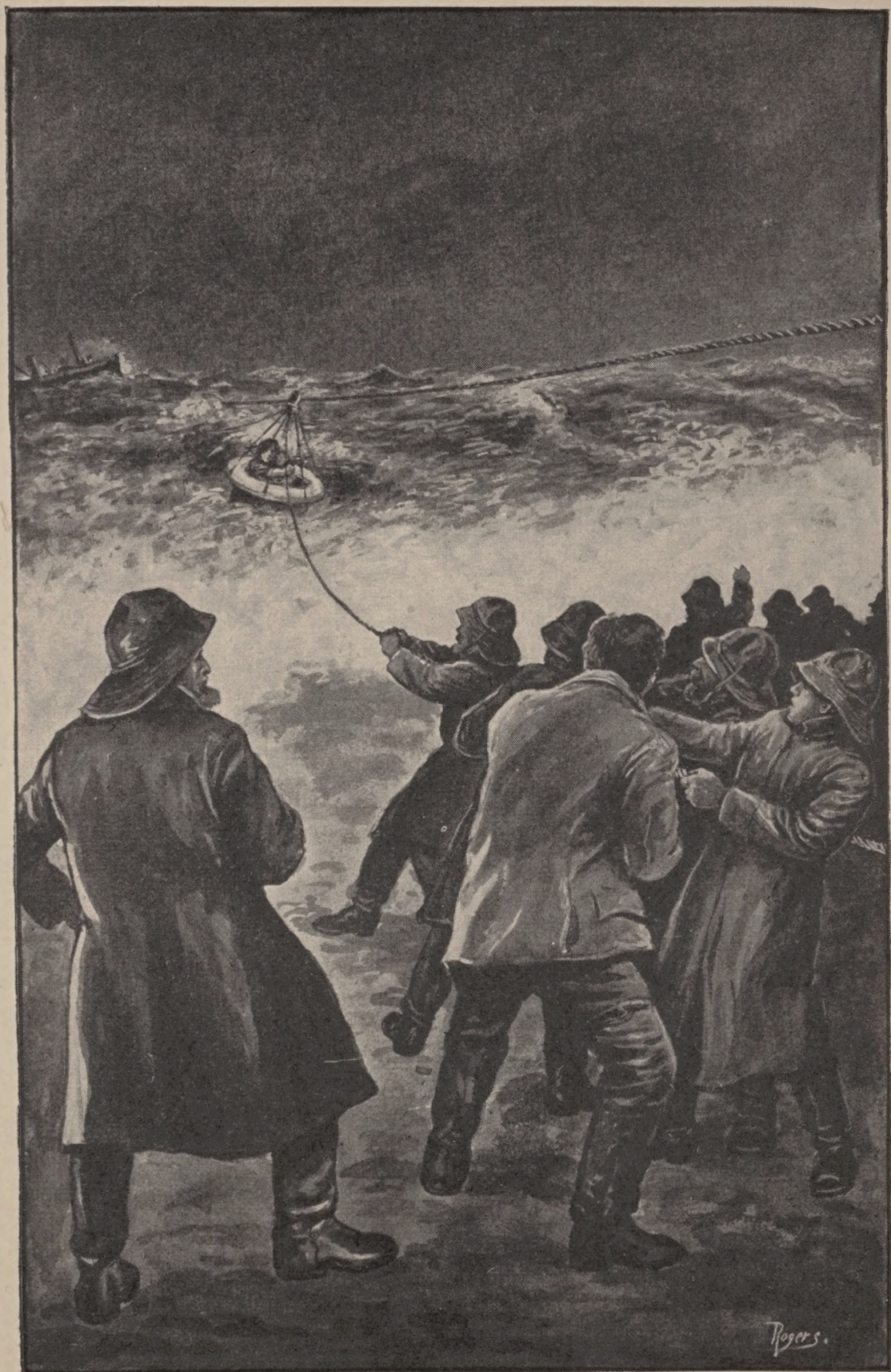
It seemed incredible, but it was true. The woman, the only one aboard with a baby, had been put into the buoy, clasping her child in her arms, and the two had been hauled ashore above the angry waves, the spray of which drenched them.

“Lively now, men! Help her and the child out, and then haul the buoy back!” cried Captain Lon. “We’ve got lots of work ahead of us yet!”

Tender hands assisted the woman out, and, with her babe still clasped to her breast, she was taken to a shelter house, where she would be revived with warm drinks.

“Haul away!” cried Captain Lon. “Haul away, boys, and everybody on the jump!”

Again they hauled the apparatus aboard, and once more came a mighty pull when another passenger was placed in the buoy. It proved to also be a woman; but in this case the wife of one of the steamer’s officers, who must have been accustomed to storms, for she displayed the utmost bravery,



“Haul in quick now, men.”

refusing to leave the spot, and declaring it to be her intention to stand by, lending any assistance she could until every soul aboard the steamer, her husband of course included, was saved.

From her the captain learned that there were no more women aboard save a stewardess, who would come next, no doubt; though the poor thing had nearly collapsed at the prospect of being compelled to trust herself in that frail buoy, with the sea underneath apparently eager to seize its prey.

There were fully two dozen and more men, though some she believed must have been lost during the period of horror immediately after they struck, and when a panic had occurred, everybody believing that the steamer was about to break up at once, in the darkness of the night.

As yet no bodies had come ashore, though when there was time to make a strict search doubtless the life-savers would find these. It was always a policy with Captain Lon to have his men accomplish this gruesome task before any of the wreckers were around, so that there might be no suspicion attached to the beach combers in the way of taking valuables from the unfortunates who had lost their lives. There are ghouls in nearly every coast community, to whom the desire to take possession of money found under such circumstances is irresistible; and the keeper of Wyamoke Station felt that it

was a part of his duty to remove this temptation as much as possible.

The stewardess was brought safely ashore, though she had swooned; and only for the rope that secured her to the traveling buoy, must have fallen into the waiting sea.

"Take her up to the house, boys!" called Captain Lon to several other men who had gathered to watch the work of life-saving.

"I'll go with her, poor thing!" offered the woman who had been the second to come ashore. "I'll take care of her!"

"That's the way to talk!" cried Captain Lon. "Come on now, boys! She's breakin' up fast, and we haven't any time to waste! Git busy! Here, Bob, over here!" and he signaled to our hero to take his station near him.

"Haul away!" came the order again, Bob being proud that he had been called to stand at his captain's side.

Again and again did those brave workers send that faithful messenger back and forth, each time bringing a new passenger. Their arms grew stiff with the labor, yet nothing would permit them to give up. When some of the rescued sailors evinced a desire to give a lift, Captain Lon gladly availed himself of the chance to let several of his exhausted men get a temporary rest. Nothing could drive the eager Bob away from the work, for he was

having the time of his life, assisting to get those poor fellows ashore, after many of them had about given up all hope.

"There's one passenger out there still," a seaman shouted to Captain Lon, in the hearing of Bob; "but they can't coax him to come yet. He says as how he was a sea captain himself and so he's bound to wait till everybody's gone but the skipper. Then, next to last, he'll take his turn."

"I take off my hat to him as a brave man!" called back the keeper, who knew what it meant to exhibit such a fine spirit when the opportunity to save one's own life was at hand. Only a gallant nature could display such a noble front.

At last it was said by one seaman when he came ashore that there were only the two captains left; and that it was an open chance whether they could be gotten to land before the break came, for the steamer was pitching frightfully, with ominous groanings all the while.

When the breeches buoy came ashore the next time, to the astonishment of the life-savers it bore a very angry man, who turned out to be the captain of the steamer.

"He picked me up as if I was a baby, and putting me in the breeches buoy, began to pull at the rope until I was too far gone to think of getting back," he gasped in his excitement. "Said I had a wife

and kiddies at home, while never a soul there was to shed a tear for him! It's monstrous! What will my people say when they hear that I wasn't the last one to leave my own vessel? But get busy and send the buoy out to him, boys. That gallant old man mustn't be left to die there in my place!"

Indeed, he was so excited by the mere thought, that he laid hold himself, though weakened by all he had endured, and persisted in trying to help them send the breeches buoy, that had already done such splendid work that day, once more out along the hawser by means of the traveling block.

It reached the steamer, because Captain Lon could see the lone figure of the brave old man working at it. Then he made a signal, and with a shout the keeper of Wyamoke Life-saving Station, more excited than Bob had even seen him, urged his men to pull for all they were worth; because he knew from the fatal signs that at any moment now the dreaded catastrophe was about to come about.

His worst predictions were confirmed, for they had not succeeded in dragging the buoy more than two-thirds of the way to the shore when the captain gave a loud shout. At the same time the big hawser collapsed, falling into the sea as the steamer broke in two; and the human occupant of the breeches buoy seemed in dire danger of being drowned.

CHAPTER XXIX

A STRANGE MEETING

FOR a moment the accident, coming as it did, just when success seemed assured, unnerved everyone. They all stood helpless, looking off into the boiling sea that was rapidly swallowing up what was left of the steamer, and then at the limp rope, to which must be clinging, in a smother of foam, the brave old sailor who had been the last to leave the vessel.

Then Captain Lon, springing forward, cried:

"Pull, men, pull! It's our last and only chance! We've got to haul him ashore the best way we can! Grab hold of that hawser, and yank him in!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" chanted Bob. "Come on, fellows!"

The life-savers needed no urging. As one man they leaped to grasp the now limp hawser, and a second later were hauling it in from the sea, hand over hand, seeking to tell, by the weight and feel whether there was a human being on the other end.

There was just a chance that the sailor, who had

preferred to be the last to leave the steamer, might still be clinging to the breeches buoy, or he might have seen the coming of the end, and have lashed himself fast. In this case he could be brought ashore. But could he live in all that wild riot of water, through which he must be pulled, his head beneath it most of the time? That was a question each man was asking himself.

"How about it?" panted Bob, as he stood beside his captain. "Do you think he's still there?"

"I—I think so, boy," was the hesitating answer. "I can feel a weight and drag on the rope, but—maybe it's only a mass of seaweed, or a bit of the wreck!"

"Oh, if only we can save him!" gasped Bob.

"Pull! Pull!" cried Captain Lon, and, hand over hand, he, Bob and the others hauled in on the rope. In it came, piling up in curled wet masses on the storm-swept sands. Out from the sea it came, like some writhing snake.

"There he is!" someone shouted. "There he is!"

Through the mist of spray Bob peered, and saw, in the heaving, foam-capped billows, the form of a man clinging to the breeches buoy. With desperate hands the sailor was clinging, as to a last hope. If he had lashed himself fast the lashings were now loose, and only his own grip kept him from being washed off into the deeper water.

"Pull men, pull!" cried the captain, but the life-savers needed no urging. Frantically they hauled in on the rope.

Suddenly Bob gave a great cry.

"He's off! He let go! Stop dragging on that rope!"

In an instant the boy had dropped his hold of the hawser, and had sprung forward. He had seen the sailor being swept away from the life-line, and he knew what that meant. Out into the boiling surf waded Bob, and before the receding wave could wash the inert body away the boy had grasped the clothing.

"Come on!" cried Bob. "We've got to save him this way!"

The men understood in an instant, and, dropping the rope, leaped to the side of Bob. And greatly he needed their help, for with the sea tugging to pull away from him the unconscious form of the man he was trying to save, and with the treacherous undertow gripping him, our hero was in a dire plight. But he would not let go.

Securing a better grip on the unconscious form, Bob, taking advantage of an incoming billow, started to wade back up the beach. Before he had taken three steps he was overwhelmed by a rush of green water. He struggled against it, but found himself being sucked back—he and the form he bore.

"Help!" he managed to cry, but his mouth was

filled with salt water and his voice died away in a mere gurgle.

"Come on, men!" cried Captain Lon. "Grab hands—a human chain! That's what we need!"

It was done on the instant. One man made of himself an anchor, high up on the sand. The others, forming in line, clasped hands, one with the other, ending with Captain Lon, who rushed into the smother of salty spray and spume.

"I'm coming, Bob! I'm coming!" cried the sturdy captain. "Hold on to him!"

Bob heard, but could not answer. But he gripped, all the tighter, the burden he bore, and tried to brace his feet in the shifting sands.

Then, as the human chain stretched out, the sturdy hand of the captain gripped the boy, and the word was called:

"Pull in!"

And pull in the men did. With all their might they heaved against the tearing grip of the stormy sea. Up the beach they pulled Bob and the figure he still grasped. Up the beach, out of the swirling waves, until they were safe among the sand dunes and somewhat sheltered from the ripping wind.

"Good boy, Bob! You have him!" cried the captain.

"Yes," panted Bob, for his breath was nearly spent. "I have him. But—but is he alive?"

A look at the inert and water-soaked form on

the beach seemed to give answer that he was dead. But Captain Lon was not the one to give up.

"Get him to the house right away!" was the order. "We'll soon see. It was a close call, Bob, but you got him!"

"I wouldn't have—only for you," said the boy, in a low voice.

Ordering some of his men to patrol the storm-swept beach on the chance of rescuing other unfortunates, Captain Lon, with Bob and some of the others, carried the unconscious form to the shelter house. Then began the hard work of coaxing back, into the inert body, the little spark of life that might lurk somewhere.

Using the regular means of inducing respiration, Bob and Captain Lon, as well as his men, worked by turns over the old sailor. It seemed almost hopeless.

Indeed Bob, wiping a suspicious mist from his eyes, looked toward Captain Lon, and whispered:

"I guess it's too late!"

"No! No!" fiercely exclaimed the veteran lifesaver. "He breathes! See, he breathes!"

And it was so. A tremulous breath passed the lips of the unconscious man, and from then on the lungs took up their work. He was breathing naturally. He was on the road to life once more.

Hot blankets in a dry bed, with bottles of hot water to further raise the temperature, were the

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next means tried, and in a short time the doctor, who had been summoned, gave it as his opinion that the seaman would live. He was still very weak and faint, however, from his buffeting by the sea.

The other rescued ones had been looked after, and Captain Lon, wishing to send word to the relatives of the sailor Bob had rescued, began looking through the pockets of the sodden clothes, for some address.

Among other things was found a small memorandum book, enclosed in a water-proof case, and on opening this, a name was discovered.

Bob, who was looking over the captain's shoulder, was startled to read:

"Captain Thomas A. A. Morgan. Bark Mary Ellen. Baltimore, Md."

"Why—why!" gasped Bob, before he thought. Captain Lon turned quickly to the boy.

"Did you know him?" he asked.

"No, not exactly," was the slow answer, "but I know *of* him. Unless I'm mistaken this is the same Captain Morgan of whom Captain Osgood spoke."

"What! The Captain Osgood you mentioned—the one you pulled from in front of a train?" demanded the wondering life-saver.

"The same one," replied Bob. "That was his name!"

"Well, if this don't beat the Dutch!" cried Captain Lon. "Things do turn out funny in this world. But we'll make sure, Bob, as soon as he can talk."

But great as was the curiosity of Bob and Captain Lon, they had to restrain it until the next day, since the doctor would not let them question the old sailor. Finally, however, after some nourishing broth had been given, and some restorative medicine, Bob and Captain Lon were admitted to the room where the rescued man lay. He was weak, but his eyes were bright, and he showed wonderful recuperative powers for so aged a man.

"I—I can't thank you enough, now, for what you did for me," he said, with a smile. "But maybe I can—sometime."

"You needn't try," spoke Bob, clasping the hand that was held out to him. "Are we right in calling you Captain Morgan?"

"That's my name. Captain Thomas A. A. Morgan."

"Late commander of the *Mary Ellen*?" went on Bob.

"Yes, but how—"

"We were looking through your effects, to see to whom to send some word about you," explained Captain Lon, holding out the memorandum book. "We saw your name, and my friend here," he nodded at Bob, "wants to ask you some questions."

"All right," assented Captain Morgan, with a nod. "Go ahead."

"Do you know a Captain John Osgood?" asked Bob.

"Surely. He sailed as mate with me on the *Mary Ellen*. But he was swept overboard and lost in the hurricane that destroyed my ship."

"No!" exclaimed Bob eagerly, "excuse me, but he was not lost!"

"Not lost!" and Captain Morgan sat up in bed.

"He was picked up at sea," Bob went on to explain, "and when I met him, not long ago, and chanced to pull him out of the way of a railroad train, he told me his story. A sad one it was too, for he said all his life's savings—five thousand dollars—were lost with the *Mary Ellen*." And Bob told the story as he had heard it.

"Ha!" exclaimed Captain Morgan. "Then here's where you and he are wrong. Captain Osgood's five thousand dollars aren't lost!"

"What do you mean?" asked Bob, wondering if the rescued man's mind was wandering because of his sufferings. "His money not lost when the ship went down?"

"That's another mistake!" said Captain Morgan. "The ship didn't founder, and go down, as Osgood thought it did when he was swept away. The *Mary Ellen* was nigh to it, however, but she managed to stagger on through the gale, and kept

afloat for another day after poor Osgood left us,—forever, as we thought.

“Finally we were blown upon a rocky reef, near a small island just off Porto Rico, and there the bark was left high, if not dry, when the sea went down. She was firmly fixed on the rocks, and there she is to this day—if the natives haven’t pulled her to pieces.”

“You don’t mean it!” cried Bob.

“Oh, but I do,” insisted Captain Morgan. “And her going on the rocks, that way, was probably the saving of me and what was left of my crew. We were taken off by the natives when the waves went down, and kindly treated. Then I came on North, and I was traveling as a passenger on this steamer when this storm came. I seem to be running into storms lately.”

“But what about Captain Osgood’s money?” asked Bob.

“As I said, it must still be in the wreck. If he hid it in a secret compartment in his stateroom, as you say he did, it isn’t likely that the wrecking natives have discovered it, for they would only take the metal work off the ship. They wouldn’t bother to break her up for just the wood, and the sea hasn’t quite pounded her to pieces yet.

“So you see there’s a very good chance that the five thousand dollars is still in the wreck, and it ought to be easy to get at.”

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Bob gave a surprised whistle, and started from the room.

"Where are you going?" asked Captain Lon, in wonder.

"I'm going to send a telegram to Captain Osgood, telling him of his good fortune!" cried the young life-saver.

Bob scarcely knew what to wire to the old sea captain, who had, doubtless, long before this, given up all hope of ever seeing his money again.

"But I think I can get it for him," mused Bob, on his way to the telegraph office. "That is, I can tell him how to get it. But I must not be too positive. Suppose, after all, it should not be there? That would be a terrible disappointment. I guess I'll have to play foxy, and just give him a hint to say that there is a faint chance of getting back his little fortune. Then, if it fails, he won't be much more broken up than he is now. Yes, I've got to be careful."

He thought of the pathetic figure of the poor sailor, who had allowed himself to get so weak from hunger, rather than beg, that he had endangered his own life under the train.

"I must be careful not to shock him," thought Bob, as he wrote out the telegram. He had to make several attempts before he had it finished to his satisfaction, and even after the agent began ticking

it off, the youth wished he had worded it differently. But it was too late then.

"I'll just let it go at that, and trust to a later explanation by letter," Bob thought.

In substance, he had said in the message, that he had received unexpected news of the money left in the *Mary Ellen* and he asked Captain Osgood if it would be possible for him to come on and make a trip to San Juan. Of course it might have been possible for the aged captain to wire to some one near the scene of the wreck instructions as to how to get at the hidden wealth, but there was also the possibility that the request would fall into dishonest hands.

Then, too, Captain Morgan had spoken of natives in the vicinity of the place where the *Mary Ellen* was wrecked. And these natives could hardly be relied upon. They might be honest, or they might not. At any rate, even if Captain Osgood could get some reliable person to go and search for the hidden money, the news of what was afoot might leak out, and the treasure hunters might be robbed.

"It's best for him to go there himself," reasoned Bob.

He was all impatience waiting for an answer to his telegram, and one seemed long in coming. But really the time was short, when it is considered that Plattsburg, where Captain Osgood lived, was not in direct telegraphic communication with Wyamoke.

And when the message did arrive Bob was rather surprised at the contents of it. He read:

“Can not tell you how surprised and pleased I am. You are indeed a good friend to me. As you say, I will not build too much hope on it, but I think I can get my money. Now, dear friend, can not you go with me? I would not like to go alone, and I would reward you well. Please say you will go with me.”

“Whew!” whistled Bob, as he read the message over a second time. “Me go to Porto Rico! I don’t see how it is possible, though I would give a lot to be able to go. But not for the sake of the reward; no, sir! I’d just like to see the place, and get out to that wreck. Yes, I sure would like to go!”

“What’s that—go home?” interrupted a voice, for, hardly knowing what he did, Bob had spoken aloud. “You’re not getting homesick, I hope!” and Captain Lon came up behind our hero, as he held the fluttering telegram.

“Homesick! Well, no, not exactly, though this makes me think of home,” answered Bob. “Look here!” and he held out the message.

“Hum! He wants you to go with him, I see, and help him hunt for his fortune.”

“And I wish I could go!” cried Bob, his eyes shining with excitement at the prospect. “I wouldn’t ask anything better than to make that trip. It would be great! Simply great!”

"Well, why don't you go?" asked Captain Lon, quietly.

"Go? Are you joking?"

"I never was any more serious in my life, Bob."

"But go! The idea! Here I am tied up in this life-saving business—not that I regret it—not for a moment!" he added, quickly. "I think it's the finest calling in the world, Captain Lon. But I can't get away. It's out of the question."

"Oh, is it?" asked the captain, and there was a curious note in his voice, as he looked quizzically at Bob.

"Of course it is. How could I get away?"

"Wa'al, I have heard of such things as leaves of absence, Bob, my boy," said the captain, with a droll wink at our hero. "Especially for young fellers like you that's got such influential friends at Washington. And Washington isn't a half bad place to have influential friends—not half bad, Washington ain't. I have heard of leaves of absence, Bob—jest *heard* of 'em, you know," and he winked more openly this time.

"What do you mean?" demanded Bob, for he was of such an open, ingenuous and simple nature that he never "thought around a corner." He needed to have many things made plain to him.

"What do you mean about a leave of absence?" he asked.

"Just what I said," went on the captain, this

time more seriously. "I mean that you ought to write to your uncle in Washington, and ask if you can't have a little time off, to help your friend, Captain Osgood. Explain the whole circumstance to him, and, by the way, it wouldn't be a bad idea to send him a little account of the wreck, though he's probably seen it in the papers, for some of the reporters from the city have been pesterin' the life out of me to tell 'em all how it happened, and how we rescued the folks. 'We jest up and rescued 'em,' I told one young feller, 'same as we allers rescues 'em! Now don't bother me no more!' That's what I told him.

"But somethin' of the rescue work we did here has got into the papers, and if your uncle sees it he'll know you've been workin' hard. Then when he lays your case—your application for leave of absence—before the proper board—it'll come all the easier if he's got something to back it up. Take my advice and ask for it."

"I will!" decided Bob, and he did. There was some correspondence between his uncle and himself, and then a delay, for matters do not move any too quickly at Washington sometimes, though compared with other governments ours is speed itself. But there had to be several letters written, an application made out in due form, setting forth all the various reasons why it was wanted, and much other red tape. But in the end Bob got what he

desired—permission to absent himself, for a certain time, from the life-saving station at Wyamoke. And the time specified was ample for him to go to Porto Rico.

His first act, after getting his leave, was to telegraph to Captain Osgood that he was coming on to Plattsburg and from there would go to San Juan with him.

Back came a telegram from the aged sailor:

“Come on, and welcome. I can hardly wait to see you.”

Bob's trip to Plattsburg was without incident worth chronicling. He had some little time to wait at the same station where he had saved the life of Captain Osgood, and many were the memories that came to him as he walked up and down the platform. He wondered if the smart young man, who evidently had had some designs on our hero, had ever come back that way again.

Bob received a rousing welcome at the humble little home where Captain Osgood lived with his relatives.

“Oh, but it's good to see you again!” cried the aged seaman, as he clasped the hand of the young life-saver. “Come right in. You don't know how much good your news has done me. Come in, boy! Come in!”

“But suppose the good news should prove bad?”

suggested Bob, who ever had in mind the possibility that, after all, the money might not be in the wreck.

"Well, I lost it once, and I can stand to lose it again—that is if I don't get it," answered Captain Osgood. "But it's made me almost young again, just to think of it."

"Then you will enjoy the trip to Porto Rico," suggested Bob.

"Indeed I will, boy! It will do me good to get the smell of salt air again. In fact, if I could afford it, I'd fit out a sailing ship of my own and make the trip. But I guess, as it is, we'd better go as passengers in a steamer."

"I think so," agreed Bob, with a smile.

There was a little girl, Lucy, in the captain's home, and Bob fell in love with her at once—a dainty little tot of about five years, who soon made friends with the young life-saver.

Bob trotted her on his knee, and gave her innumerable rides to Banbury cross, where the old lady jumped on many a white horse. Bob thought of his own sister, Janice, and then, if ever, since he had begun his career as a life-saver, he was homesick.

But the feeling soon passed away, for there was much to be done to prepare for the trip to San Juan, which was the nearest port to where the wreck of the *Mary Ellen* lay.

Captain Osgood, since the loss of his money, was dependent on his relatives, but now, since there was

a prospect of recovering his fortune, several of his friends came forward with enough money to finance the trip to Porto Rico.

The captain wanted to pay Bob's way, as well, but our hero would not hear of this, for his father had sent him money when he heard of the plans his son had made.

Finally all was in readiness for the start. Captain Osgood had packed his "dunnage bag and ditty box," as he laughingly called them, in memory of his early days spent on the sea. As a matter of fact all he took was a very modern steamer trunk, and Bob had the same amount of baggage.

They found that by journeying to New York they could get a steamer that would take them to Porto Rico in good time. It was Bob's first trip to the metropolis, and he had two days, before the steamer sailed, to enjoy the sights.

This he did to the utmost, and as Captain Osgood had friends in the big city, he looked them up, and he and Bob "had the time of their lives," as the aged man referred to it with a chuckle, afterward.

Then came the day when they were to go aboard the *Princess Marie*, which was the name of the vessel that was to take them to Porto Rico.

Clang! went the great gong, as the last arrivals came, and the final baggage was stowed aboard. Clang!

"Last bell! All ashore that's going ashore!"

cried the officers. "All ashore that's going ashore!"

There was a hurry and scurry. Hasty good-byes were said over and over again. The rail was lined with the passengers who were waving their hands, hats and handkerchiefs to those left behind.

Bob and the Captain had some friends who had come to see then off, so they did not feel as lonesome as otherwise they might have done.

Clang!

"All ashore that's going ashore!"

The big whistle blew, vibrating along the pier. The ropes of the gangplank were loosed. A fat man, who had almost missed the steamer, came puffing along, assisted by a messenger boy who was carrying his grip. He hurried up the gangplank.

"Close call, that!" exclaimed Captain Osgood.

"Yes—(puff)—that's—(puff)—what—(puff)—it—(puff)—was!" agreed the fat man.

Once more the gong clanged, again came the warning cry, and then the gangplank was pulled back onto the dock, and, with a prolonged screech of her big whistle, the *Princess Marie* started on her voyage.

CHAPTER XXX

THE MYSTERY SOLVED—CONCLUSION

“Do you think we’ll have any luck, Bob?”

“I don’t know, Captain. “It’s just as I said, a bare chance, and nothing more.”

“I know it is, Bob. And, mind you, whatever happens, if we don’t find a cent of my money in that old hulk, I’ll never say anything but what I never can thank you enough for having helped me. Mind you that!”

“I understand,” said the young life-saver. “But I’m going to keep on hoping that the money’s there—until we get to the place and find that secret hiding place empty.”

“Bravo! That’s the way to talk! I was feeling a bit downhearted, when I got to thinking of all the chances against us, but I’m not so any more. I’m sure we’ll find it, Bob.”

The two were on the deck of the *Princess Marie*, which was now well down New York bay on the trip that meant so much to our two friends. The weather was fine, and looking at the shining sun overhead, for it was the noon hour, Captain Osgood had said it was a good omen.

"It's better to start in fair weather than foul, Bob," he chuckled. "We've got something on our side to begin with."

Every minute and detail of the trip was enjoyed by Bob, and he inspected all parts of the ship. For he thought the information thus gained might be of service to him in his chosen calling. The vessel looked strong and mighty, yet he had seen how one just as stanch had been made a plaything for the sea, and sent to her doom.

When half way to San Juan they ran into a storm. In one way Bob was glad of this, for it gave him more experience, but he was sorry for Captain Osgood, who, in some ways, was like a child.

"Our good luck has deserted us," complained the old seaman.

"Oh, no, it hasn't!" laughed Bob, as he clung to a rail on the deck. "This is only a little taste of what we life-savers get. Only this is the opposite end of it."

"We're a good way from any life-savers, in case we happen to go down," gloomily said a man standing near our friends. "This is a terrible storm!"

"Oh, it might be worse," spoke Bob.

He was interested in watching how the sailors went about their work, and how, as much as possible, everything was made snug against the gale that howled through the rigging, and made strange and

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weird music over the aërials of the wireless system.

But the gale blew itself out, and the passengers could come on deck and enjoy the fair weather.

One feature of the ship that interested Bob very much was the wireless equipment. He made friends with the operator, who showed him how the wireless waves were sent out from the generator controlled by a key.

And then he let Bob listen, with the twin telephone receivers to his ears, while the apparatus was "tuned in" to catch the faint click that told of another ship talking to the *Princess Marie*.

"Who is it?" asked Bob, who was able to catch part of the message, from having practiced on his and his brothers' simple wireless outfit at home.

"Our sister ship, the *Princess Ellen*," was the answer of the operator. "She is reporting all well on board, though she had a little trouble in the gale. I'll talk to Kelly—he works the wireless on her."

Then he sat down to his instrument, and for a time Bob listened to the crack as the spark-gap wheel revolved, and looked at the bluish light that filled the little operating room.

Other than the gale, the voyage to San Juan was uneventful, and in due season this Porto Rican harbor was reached.

To Captain Osgood there was little new or wonderful in the scene, but to Bob everything was a delight. It was all so new and strange to him. He

was interested in everything, from the natives to the buildings, and the different manner in which things were done from those to which he was accustomed.

"Now," said Captain Osgood, when they had landed, "the first place is to find a good hotel, and there we can make our plans."

Fortunately the old sailor had been in many ports, and San Juan was one of them, though it had been years before, during the time the island was under Spanish rule.

"There's been a big improvement since Uncle Sam took hold," he confided to Bob.

Soon they were established in comfortable quarters, and were ready to proceed with their plan of trying to get the money hidden on the wreck of the *Mary Ellen*.

"How are you going to go about it?" asked Bob.

"We've got to get some sort of a craft to take us out there," answered Captain Osgood. "And the smaller the better."

"Why?" Bob wanted to know.

"Because we don't want to take any more people on this trip than we have to. Matters down here are different from up our way. There is a great deal of poverty, and I suppose the crime that goes with it. Once a certain set of natives learned that there was money aboard that craft they would tear her up into kindling wood to get at it. We've got to be very careful."

Bob agreed with this, and he and Captain Osgood talked the matter over carefully and at some length.

The night of their arrival was a festival in San Juan, and soon after dark the plaza about the hotel was a scene of gaiety. Bob and the old sailor went out to enjoy it, and strolled about, listening to the tinkle of innumerable guitars and the singing of Spanish love songs. It was a rare delight to the young life-saver, and Captain Osgood enjoyed it as well.

That night, after getting back to their hotel at rather a late hour, for the Porto Ricans dislike to stop celebrating, once they begin, the captain said:

“Well, Bob, I think I have hit on a plan.”

“Glad to hear you say so! What is it?”

“We must go out to the wreck in a motorboat, with one man.”

“But will that be safe?”

“I think so. The weather is good now, and there will be hardly any sea on. Of course we’ll get a good sized motorboat—one that will ride the waves if we encounter any.”

“But will one man be enough of a crew?” Bob wanted to know.

“Yes. Then you and I can go aboard the wreck, while he stays in his craft. If we had two men one of them might follow us.”

“I see!” agreed Bob. “It’s a good plan.”

The proper motorboat was not hard to find along

the water front, when Captain Osgood and our hero started out the next morning. But the captain was very particular about what sort of a man he engaged. Several times Bob thought they had come across the very best craft possible for their purpose, but the captain shook his gray head.

"I don't like the looks of her skipper," he said. "I wish I could get hold of some American. But they all seem to be Spanish ones here. However, we'll do the best we can."

A little later they saw one of the best boats they had yet encountered.

"Now if there's the right kind of a man aboard she'll do," murmured Captain Osgood. They walked toward the craft, and saw a pleasant-faced Spaniard coming out of the small cabin.

"Good day to you, senors!" he exclaimed, with a bow and a smile that showed his white, even teeth. "Are you pleased to go for a sail this beautiful day?"

"What crew have you?" asked Captain Osgood.

"Crew! Oh, I am the crew—I am the captain and the crew alike, at your sarvaice, senors!" and he bowed and smiled engagingly.

"We'll come aboard and look about," decided Captain Osgood. "But mind you," he warned the man, "that doesn't mean we'll take your boat."

"Of a surely not, senor. You are welcome, and I hope to please you."

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Bob liked the man, and so, apparently, did Captain Osgood.

The boat, too, met with the approval of the old sailor. He looked her over carefully, but when they came to the gasoline motor Captain Osgood appealed to Bob.

"Is she a good one?" he asked.

"Yes. It's like some they use in the lifeboats," was the answer.

"That's good enough for us. I think we'll engage you. What is your name?"

"Miguel Fernandez—at your sarvaice, senor!" came with another low bow.

"Well, now, Fernandez, I'll tell you what we want," went on Captain Osgood. "just come down in the cabin and shut the door. I'm not used to letting everyone hear my business, and I see two or three fellows hanging around the pier. I don't like their looks either."

"Oh, they are very fine fellows, senor," said Fernandez, quickly. "They are gentlemans all."

"Well, there's no need of them listening to my affairs. Now then," he went on, as he closed the door, "do you know anything about the wreck of the *Mary Ellen*?" and he looked sharply at the Spaniard.

"The *Marie Ellen*!" was the retort, Fernandez giving the Latin pronunciation. "Of a surely, yes. I know her to my sorrow!"

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“How is that?”

“I ran into her the other night in the dark, and sprung a leak in my boat. I have no liking for the *Marie Ellen*!”

“Then if you ran into her you know where she lays,” said the old captain, eagerly. “And you can take us out to her?”

“Oh, yes, of a surely I could, senors,” was the answer, “but,” with a shrug of his shoulders, “why do the Americanos wish to go to the wreck? There is nothing of value aboard her. Why do you wish to go?”

“Oh, put it down to curiosity if you like,” said Bob, with a laugh. “But is it safe to go out there in your boat?”

“In daylight, yes, senor. I can put you aboard when the tide is right, and I can judge that well.”

“All right—then we’ll go!” decided Captain Osgood. “When can you start?”

“Right away. The tide is at her best, and we can be back before dark.”

“All right! Cast off!”

A little later Bob and Captain Osgood stood on the small deck of the motorboat, headed for the scene of the foundering of the *Mary Ellen*.

“Is that the wreck?” asked Bob, pointing to a dark spot in the water.

“That is the American sheep, senor,” was the answer. “We shall be up to heem, presently.”

“But can we go aboard? that’s the question,” asked Captain Osgood.

“Of a surely, señor. I have judged the time and tide right, as you shall see. But it is strange you wish to go aboard. There is not much to see, even for Americanos. The wreckers—they have stripped her clean.”

“Well, I hope they didn’t get my money,” thought Captain Osgood, as he looked off toward where, held in a grip of rocks, near an island not far from Porto Rico, was what was left of the *Mary Ellen*.

Fernandez was as good as his word, and soon had the motor craft close alongside the weather-beaten wreck. She had been much despoiled by the natives, but it was easy to get to her deck, the sea being very calm, and the motorboat putting into a sheltered cove.

“Well, señors, you are here,” announced Fernandez, as he made his craft fast. “Now, will you go aboard?”

“Yes,” said Captain Osgood, “we will. You’d better stay here, my friend,” he remarked to the Spaniard. “I won’t be long. You see I used to be mate aboard this vessel, and I had a few keepsakes I’d like to get—if they are still here.”

Fernandez shrugged his shoulders.

“Ha! Keepsakes! The señor will be lucky if he finds them. The thieving natives have been

swarming over the wreck like turkey buzzards over a dead horse. They have picked her bones clean."

But Bob and Captain Osgood did not give up hope. They made their way on deck, and then, with the old sailor in the lead, they went below.

"This was my stateroom," said the former mate, as they came to the cabin. "There isn't much left—that's a fact."

Indeed the interior of the *Mary Ellen* was but a shell.

"Right in here I had all my things," went on the old captain, "and when I rushed out of here, for the last time, I clean forgot about my money."

"I only hope it's here!" murmured Bob.

"We'll soon see," was the whispered comment.

Captain Osgood went to a certain place in the bulkhead wall. His trembling fingers fumbled about for a few seconds, and he seemed at a loss. Bob was fearful for the effect disappointment might have on the old man. But he need not have worried.

There was a click, as Captain Osgood pressed on a secret spring. Then, to Bob's surprise, a seemingly solid piece of the wall slid back, and there was revealed a little recess.

In shot the trembling hand of Captain Osgood, and when it came out his fingers clutched a package of yellow, oiled silk.

"There it is!" he cried. "There it is!"

"Hush!" cautioned Bob. "He may hear you!" and he nodded toward the Spaniard outside.

Captain Osgood's hands trembled so that he could scarcely cut the strings that bound the packet, but when Bob had helped him, and they had opened it, there was revealed in the dim light of the dismantled cabin, a pile of bank notes.

"There they are!" hoarsely whispered the old captain. "There's my little fortune, safe and sound! Oh, thank the dear Lord, and thank you too, Bob Spencer!" and his eyes filled with tears.

"Pshaw! I didn't do anything," protested Bob. "It was all your good luck. Now come on, let's get out of here. It may get rough, and this isn't the safest place in the world!"

Concealing the package of bank notes in his pocket, the old captain, followed by Bob, made his way up on deck again, and entered the motorboat.

"Well?" questioned Fernandez. "The keepsakes—did you find them?"

"Yes," chuckled Captain Osgood, "I found 'em all right."

"The senor was very lucky. See, there come some more of the human buzzards to see if there is still anything on the bones of the wreck that they may take away."

He pointed to several native boats which were approaching the ill-fated *Mary Ellen*. The craft contained a number of dark-skinned men.

At the sight of one of them Bob started, and stared so that the attention of him at whom he was

gazing was attracted to him. Seeing which Bob turned aside his head. And then he murmured to himself:

“Is it possible that he can be here? It certainly looks like him. I must make inquiries!”

As Fernandez was maneuvering his craft to get out of the cove, the native boats approached nearer, and Bob, being careful not to look in the direction of the dark man at whom he had stared, whispered:

“I say, Fernandez, do you know any of those chaps?”

“Of a surety, yes, senor.”

“Who is that biggest one, in the second boat—the one who is darker than the others?”

“Oh, heem? I do not know—but all the others I do. He must be a stranger. Why, do you know heem?”

“Maybe,” responded Bob evasively, but to himself he said: “If that isn’t Black Carlos I miss my guess. He must have come here after that smuggling game fell through. Now if I can only tell the proper authorities, and have him arrested, it will be a good thing for Uncle Dave, for Uncle Sam, and a feather in my cap. Let’s see how I can work it.”

Bob was unusually silent during the trip back to San Juan, but neither of the other men noticed it. Captain Osgood was too busy thinking of his fortune, so strangely recovered; the fortune that had remained hidden from the prying natives. Fernan-

dez was occupied with steering his boat, and wondering at the queer Americanos who would pay him good money to bring them off to a wreck, merely to get keepsakes. Surely they were not right in their heads, but what was that to him, as long as he got his money? Of a surety, nothing.

The young life-saver got busy, as soon as he was ashore again. He paid a visit to the customs office, and was closeted with the chief.

Bob's credentials, the fact that his uncle was high in authority at Washington, coupled with the news the lad brought, gained for him instant and close attention. He told as much of the story as was necessary, and expressed the belief that Black Carlos, for his own purposes, was standing in with the wreck-stripping natives.

"Perhaps he is going to land a contraband cargo at the wreck, and take it off at some opportune time," suggested Bob.

"I would not be a bit surprised if that were the case," agreed the officer. "I will have my men on the watch."

Which he did, to such good advantage, that, through a spy, it was learned that the man Bob suspected was really Black Carlos, and that he was planning to land some smuggled goods.

A trap was laid for him, and as Bob had still some time left to remain in San Juan before taking a steamer home, he was invited to accompany the

raiding party. Captain Osgood begged to be excused.

"I've had enough of the strenuous life," he said. "All I want to do now is to go home, tell the good news, and rest."

Bob, the customs officer, and some armed guards were hidden in the old wreck on the night Black Carlos had planned his trick. Everything worked well. As soon as some of the smuggled goods were brought aboard, and as soon as Black Carlos and his men were on the deck of the old wreck, they were set upon by the customs authorities.

"Hands up!" called the officers, in Spanish, "We've got you!"

"And you can join Jose Lopez!" added Bob.

"Lopez! Who speaks of Lopez!" cried Carlos, fiercely, as he struggled, in vain, to get out of the grip of the officers.

"I do!" cried Bob, stepping into the glare of an electric torch. "I do, Black Carlos! I helped capture your friend Lopez, and now I'm here to see you caught!"

"Ha! That pig of a coast-guard!" spluttered Carlos, and he made a spring toward Bob. But he was held back.

The other smugglers, once they saw their leader subdued, made no resistance, and all were soon lodged in jail. Bob received the thanks of the authorities, but he insisted that it was only a matter of luck, which, in a sense, it was.

Black Carlos, fleeing from the States after the capture of Lopez, had chosen Porto Rico as a place for his illegal operations. And, after his capture, the mysterious smuggling of goods, which had baffled the authorities for some time, ceased, much to their gratification.

The smugglers were tried, convicted, and sentenced to long terms. But, after all, Carlos and Lopez did not meet in prison, for the latter was in a federal institution up North, while Carlos was retained in Porto Rico, the scene of his latest exploits.

"Well, I guess there's nothing more to keep us here," remarked Bob to Captain Osgood, one day, after our hero had given his testimony against Black Carlos.

"No, Bob, and I'll be anxious to get home again. My daughter, and little Lucy, will be waiting for me. And, thank the dear Lord, we won't have to worry about the future, now," added the old sailor, with feeling.

The next day Bob and the captain sailed North, the packet of money carefully put away. In due time Captain Osgood reached Plattsburg, where he lived the rest of his life in comfort and ease, secure from the storms and stress of the sea.

Of course Bob went back to the life-saving station, where he was warmly welcomed by his mates and Captain Lon. He found several letters waiting for him, one being from his mother, speaking about how well her watch kept time.

“Huh! That’s sort of strange!” remarked Bob, and it remained a mystery to him until he read a letter from his brother Dave, who explained that, after a long search, he had found the watch where Bob had dropped it during the struggle. It had been stepped on, and trodden into the soft dirt. Dave had taken the time-piece to a jeweler’s, who repaired it so that it was better than ever. Dave wrote that only then had he told his mother the story. Mrs. Spencer had cried a little, but of course she had forgiven Bob.

“It’s queer, though,” wrote Dave, “that you didn’t tell her yourself, Bob. She’s been thinking, all this while, that you had the watch—that is, until I gave it to her.”

“But I did write!” exclaimed Bob. “That Caleb must have lost the letter I gave him to mail.” And when Caleb was asked about this, he confessed that such had been the case. The letter had been lost out of his pocket, and he was afraid to confess it. And so the watch mystery was cleared up, as had been the mysteries concerning the smugglers, and Captain Osgood’s fortune.

Bob, as did the others at the Wyamoke Station, found that their efforts in rescuing those from the foundered fruit steamer, had placed the surfmen in the hero class. They received formal thanks from Washington, and the newspapers had glowing accounts of the rescues.

“By Jove, Bob!” exclaimed his brother Dave, when, that Summer, Bob was home on leave, “you certainly are a lucky chap. I wish something like that would happen to me!”

“Who knows but what it will?” asked Bob, with a smile. “If you get into the Secret Service you’re likely to have some high old times all right.”

“Yes, if I ever do get there,” sighed Dave.

And how Dave did, and what happened to him when he received that cherished appointment, will be related in the next volume of this series, to be called: “Dave Spencer on Secret Service; Or, Uncle Sam’s Search for Counterfeiters.”

For soon after Bob had succeeded in clearing up the mystery of the lost fortune, word came from Uncle David that he had one of the hardest nuts to crack that had ever been his luck to meet. This was nothing less than the operation of a band of men who were putting out such clever imitations of Uncle Sam’s money that even bankers were deceived.

“And I don’t know but what I’ll have to call on some of you boys to help me,” Uncle David wrote, half humorously. He hardly realized what would come of his remark, nor how his nephew, with his aid, and the aid of other Secret Service employes, would put an end to the daring acts of the counterfeiters.

When Fall came again, with the prospect of

storms that would lash the ocean to fury, and sweep vessels ashore, the crews of the various life-saving stations, who had been allowed leave during the Summer, re-assembled. Of course Bob went to Wyamoke, where he met his old friends again.

"Well, I see you're ready to help us out once more, Bob," remarked Captain Lon Shanley, as he greeted his young helper.

"Yes, I'm on the job, Cap!"

"And I'm glad of it. The folks around here haven't forgotten you, I can tell you. Had a letter from Captain Morgan the other day. He said he might stop off some day and give us a call. He wants to have you tell him all the particulars of how you helped Captain Osgood get his money, and how you gave the tip about Black Carlos."

"Oh, it was luck—just luck!" exclaimed Bob. "I think I'll go out and see if I can get some fish," the boy added. For Bob was modest, and did not like to talk about what he had done.

And so, as he is going out toward the little pier to try his luck, we will take leave of Bob Spencer, the Life-Saver.

THE END

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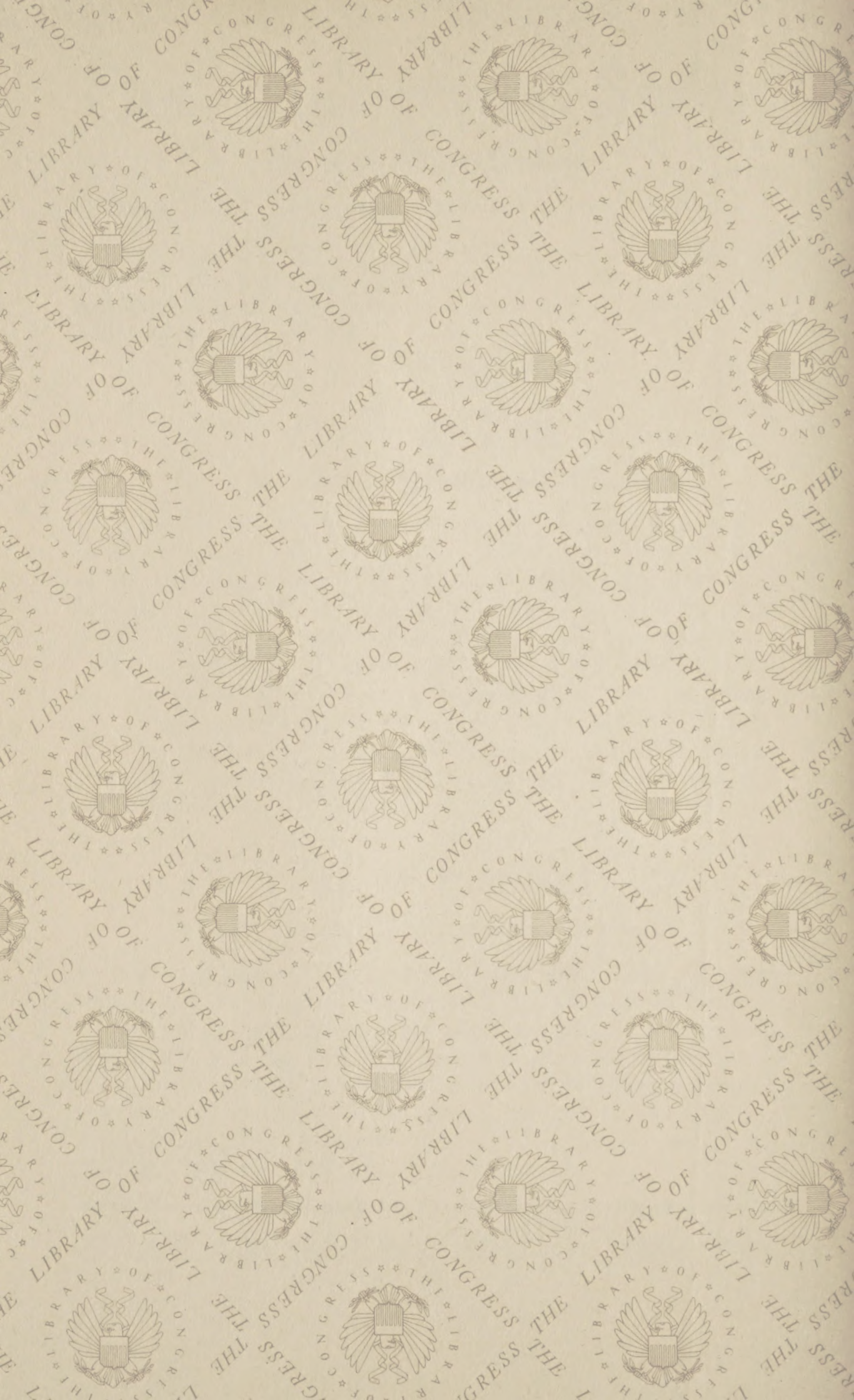
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